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SKETCHES

OF

LIFE AMONG MY AIN FOLK

By WILLIAM ALEXANDER

Author of "Johnny Gibb of Gushetneuk;" "Notes and Sketches Illustrative of Northern Rural Life in the Eighteenth Century," etc

Second Edition

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PREFACE.

In a Prefatory Note to the first edition of this small volume, published in 1875, it was stated that the Sketches composing it "profess to be nothing more than slight studies, *in situ*, so to speak, of certain phases of local life, and the 'humours' through which that life finds expression. The characters are, of course, ideal in one sense (or, say typical), and in another as truly realistic and close to the actual life as the writer could succeed in making them." More than this it seems scarcely necessary to say now. The life which it has been sought to pourtray is throughout of the most homely stamp; and there are features brought into the foreground in two of the Sketches—the "Sharger Laddie" and the "Bastard Geet"—the interest in which it will, perhaps, be said is mainly of a painful or repellant kind. All the author has got to say in reply is that he is certain he has not been guilty either of exaggeration or of depicting imaginary evils. And would that the condition of things amongst our rural labouring population were even now such as to make Sketches of the kind untrue to nature and to life.

Aberdeen, *June, 1882.*

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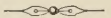
MARY MALCOLMSON'S WEE MAGGIE.



MARY MALCOLMSON'S COURTSHIP.

Poor Mary Malcolmson! her time of wedded bliss was not long; and the price she paid for it was to the hapless lassie a great price. Of course, it was a love match; and Mary's choice was not to be regarded as an unworthy one, taken simply as the choice of a true-hearted, confiding girl, prepared to join her fate, for better or worse, with that of one of the opposite sex, who could appreciate her true-heartedness, and who would reward her confidence by a yet stronger affection, and be prepared to cherish her with entire self-devotion. But in this artificial life of ours the conventionalities are to be found permeating, more or less, literally all the strata of society. And thus it was that when Mary Malcolmson, the only daughter of Saunders Malcolmson of Skellach Brae, and Margaret Malcolmson, his wife, chose to own her love for Willie Fraser, the fact of Willie being in the position of a mere farm servant, while Saunders was the actual tenant of the small farm we have named, was sufficient to rouse to a very high pitch the indignation alike of Mary's father and mother. Saunders Malcolmson himself had been born in the very same rank of life, and his elevation to the position he now occupied was due solely to the possession of qualities not dissimilar from those manifested by his daughter's lover, if Saunders had allowed himself time

to reflect upon it. But in the case of the man who has risen, in all grades of society, it happens oftener than otherwise, perhaps, that if there be not positive jealousy of youngsters following in the self-same path, there is at least the absence of that sympathy which leads to appreciation, and incites to deeds of active encouragement. And so it was here too. It was not that the lad was Mary's inferior either in point of mental cultivation or moral character. Thus far they stood on a footing of sufficiently near equality. Even Saunders Malcolmson had been wont to describe Willie Fraser as a "weel-faurt young chiel; an' a chap wi' some smeddum tee." Though the son of a mere cottar, he had both natural ability and acquired intelligence in more than average measure as compared with his fellows. But on none of these things could the mind of Saunders Malcolmson now rest. And Margaret his wife was simply carried along with him for the time.

Ah! but what demon of stupidity possessed thee, Saunders, that thou shouldst not merely "fee" a man of the stamp we have described to be thy servant, but also renew his engagement and keep him on upon terms of such intimacy as betokened the fullest confidence in the lad, until poor Mary's affections were hopelessly entangled? It boots not to ask; only one thing is certain, that when the state of matters was discovered, the first term was promptly fixed as "flittin'" time for Mary's sweetheart.

But it was too late. Weeks and months of entreaty and upbraiding, and not more the former than the latter, could not alter Mary's resolution. I do not think the poor lassie was obstinate or callous, and least of all where the feelings of her parents were concerned. That slight figure, that soft, rounded, and withal pleasant face, with its blue eyes and pale complexion, spoke rather of one whose natural disposition would have been to yield readily, unless there was some very strong reason to the contrary. And there was. Mary had

given her heart away wholly and loyally, and neither her father's hot and stern anger, nor her mother's more incisive vehemence, served to make plain to her how it ought to be or could be taken back again.

In parting with Willie Fraser, Saunders Malcolmson had spoken sharp and bitter words. It was the term-day at Martinmas, and Willie had just come home from "the yoke" at near to mid-day. He had put Saunders Malcolmson's two horses into the stable for the last time, removed the harness, carefully rubbed them down, and as carefully put food into the mangers before them. As he turned him to leave the animals he had tended so long and well, Saunders stood in the stable door. He held half-open in his hand the leathern pocket-book from which he had just extracted a small bundle of one-pound notes.

"I'll gie ye your siller," said Saunders, in a hard and surly tone. "Is't a' there?" and, as he spoke, he handed the bundle of notes to Willie Fraser.

"It's a' there," replied Willie, when he had made believe to count the seven or eight pounds handed to him; and his effort to conceal a certain degree of emotion was not quite successful.

Saunders Malcolmson put up his pocket-book, and as he did so, he said—

"There 's nae forder eese for ye here; an' the seener ye gae, the better."

"Oa, dinna be fear't, maister; I ken my place owre weel to lie aboot here i' yer road."

"Ken yer place! I howp ye'll ken't as weel aifter this as never to lat me see your face near this toon again."

"That 'll be seen," said Willie Fraser, in a tone of slightly increased firmness.

"Blackgaird! D' ye mean to tell me to my face that ye'll come back here an' brak' the peace o' my faimily?"

"I never said that," answered Willie.

"I order ye fae my toon, sir!" exclaimed the irate

Saunders, "an' never to leuk the gate o' my dother, or I'll get you pitten faur ye'll get time to dunt yer heels at leasure."

"I'll gie Mary up, fan Mary, o' her ain free will, gies me up. Till than—never!" said Willie Fraser, with an emphasis which there was no mistaking.

And thus they parted.

Saunders Malcolmson had two sons, mere boys, the elder being only sixteen, and a slimly built lad of his years; but such a heart-"scaad" had Saunders got with what had just been discovered concerning Mary, that in the fierceness of his anger he had fully determined that no adult stranger of the male sex should again be permitted to occupy the position of an extra-nean, even, in his household. That Saunder's feelings were strong, and his convictions sincere in the matter, there was the amplest proof. For his was not one of those resolutions that may be adopted at the dictation of caprice or prejudice, and capable of being carried out at no personal sacrifice or inconvenience to him who adopts it. Saunders was made of sterner stuff than that implied, and, his resolution once taken, he had dourness enough in his composition to make him stick to it, even at the cost of consequences that might be personally the reverse of agreeable. Clearly then, Saunders Malcolmson's elder son, Donald, had not physical strength for the heavier everyday duties of the farm, and Saunders sought not to impose them upon the lad. Although it was many a year since he had given up such heavy and continuous tasks, he now grimly, yet uncomplainingly, returned to the personal performance, with his own hand, of the major operations in the stable; day by day he grasped the stilts of the plough, finding only a temporary relief when in some bit of loose stubble land the "loons" might be trusted to gore away as they listed without fear of damage; if corn had to go to mill or market, he would painfully carry out every several "lade," on his own

wearied back, till the cart-loads were completed, and when the journey was accomplished, perform the like process in reverse order in unloading at the purchaser's granary.

Saunders Malcolmson, as we have said, did all this ungrudgingly; and, according to his own notion, he did it for Mary's sake. That his love for his child was of the tenderest or most discriminating sort, one might scarcely be prepared to say; but that it was not love, and love with a somewhat vigorous strength in it, I certainly would not take upon me to assert. Of one thing I feel very sure—namely, that the fact of Saunders Malcolmson voluntarily "slavin'" himself as he was doing, was not a matter of indifference to his daughter Mary. On the contrary, Mary felt it keenly, and that keenness was intensified tenfold by her perfect knowledge that she was the cause of it all. Although her father had as yet spoken no word to indicate as much, Mary's true and loving instincts had told her the whole more vividly than words could have done, in the painful thrill that went to her heart the first time she saw her father put the horses "a-yoke" after her sweetheart had left. And Margaret Malcolmson fully reckoned on all this when, addressing her daughter about this time, she said—

"Ay, Mary, 'oman, it 's geyan hard to see yer peer fader, 't 's toil't sair for 's a', fan he was abler nor he is this day, forc't to tak' up the wark-leems again to keep oot the frem't, although he be weel able an' wud be weel-wull't to pay for fat he maun jist pit 's nain han' till. Mony a sair hert does fowk get."

Poor Mary Malcolmson! let us say again. It wrung her to the heart to think of it all; that it should alter her affection, or that the contumelious terms in which the elder of her two brothers, in particular, under maternal schooling, had for the time learnt to speak of Willie Fraser in her hearing, should shake her confidence in her lover, was what in the nature of things could not well occur. For had not the passion that

throbbed within her breast possession of her whole being? And was not the object of it near to her, with a nearness that left no possible room for another to step between and cast a darkened shadow on what she knew and felt him to be?

Of course Saunders Malcolmson's resolve to eschew every "frem't" person in masculine shape could not last. It looked but a hasty "tig" at best. To enable him to keep the work of the farm going efficiently, Saunders, ere "Can'lesmas" had passed, was provided with a ploughman old enough and ugly enough to hold Cupid at bay.

But Saunders was ill satisfied about Mary's love affair still. It was not that Mary had given cause of offence by any overt act, nor even that she had declared the intention of braving her father's threat that she would be "banish't fae the toon" if she did not give up "that scoon'rel"; but simply that when Saunders and Margaret Malcolmson pressed their point harshly, Mary would look the very picture of frail, helpless misery, and if the thing were persisted in, burst into tears, piteous to behold. And then would Saunders stride about the place almost wishing, strange as it may seem to say it, that Willie Fraser, whom he had so emphatically forbidden ever to appear there again, would present his face and figure before him that his pent-up feelings might have vent.

But no such event happened; and during the next twelve months Saunders Malcolmson utterly failed in finding tangible proof that his command had not thus far been literally carried out. How Mary's courtship was continued and matured, strictly guarded as she was, must be left in the same category with those hard things that puzzled Agur, the son of Jakeh. But so it was, that in due course Saunders Malcolmson had to step sulkily aside and permit the marriage to take place, to which he had stubbornly refused to give his consent. What he could do in one way he did, inas-

much as Saunders Malcolmson, comfortable farmer as he was, saw his daughter depart from Skellach Brae without a penny of "tocher," and with barely a decent outfit to carry her to her new home. And even his own wife—who, keen as her anger had been, felt a certain compunction here—dared not put in a word of appeal or remonstrance. She dared not even to give over to her daughter's hand certain small articles of female adornment in the nature of family heirlooms, which on high occasions had been worn by Mary as suitable to her years, and so had come to be tacitly recognised as her property.

To Mary the marriage-day was a day inwardly of wildly conflicting emotions, and outwardly of much bitter weeping; and when she entered for the first time the humble abode which she was now to call her home, without the personal countenance of father or mother, though she clung as fondly and devotedly as ever to the husband of her choice, and never felt him more worthy of her love, a saddening sense of something like the realisation of that banishment, for the time being, which had been threatened, would ever and anon rise up and overpower all other feelings within her.

CHAPTER II.

MARY MALCOLMSON'S FIRST EXPERIENCES OF MARRIED LIFE.

In the experience of all but absurdly soft-headed people, the first six months of wedded bliss will presumably be recognised as more or less an abnormal phase of human existence! The relationship is totally new, and however well the couple who are thenceforth destined to draw under one and the same yoke may imagine that they had known mutual feelings, tastes, and sympathies, it can be no disparagement to either side, looking at matters in the practical aspect, to say that, before they have got fairly and evenly stretched to the "draught," the action of the traces will be felt to some extent in unanticipated tightenings and slackenings. Of course, a little experience brings all this to an end; and thenceforth the pull is steady and simultaneous. "A bullock unaccustomed to the yoke" is the figure that occurs to us, albeit, it may not be a very felicitous one. How often have we seen the willing creature, even after he had learnt to draw his single harrow quietly and demurely by himself, awkwardly taken aback, perhaps irritated to the point of positive rebellion, when put in to pull alongside another, by whose pace he must now strictly regulate his own, if he would get along comfortably or to good purpose!

I daresay that, under externally happier circumstances than her's were, Mary Malcolmson would have realised somewhat of this feeling—the feeling that well as she knew Willie Fraser before, it had now become inevitable that, in the most real sense, she had no

choice but, through experience, to learn to know and understand him better. And situated as she was in relation to her alienated parents, it is hardly to be wondered at if deep and somewhat saddened thoughts should spring up while she pondered on all that her husband must be and become to her, as she to him, in order to a completely united life, and the filling up of that great void in her heart's affections which her father's churlish treatment and her mother's vehement anger, had chosen for their part to create, and on poor Mary's part had done nothing to close or sear over.

It would be altogether untrue to say that Willie Fraser did not, in every possible way, strive to be to his wife all that, as her husband, he ought to be. In view of winning and retaining Mary's affections, his thoughts had been not those of a mere love-sick ninny, whose empty pate was filled with the one idea of complete happiness to be achieved by the single act of uniting himself for life with the woman of his choice, but rather the thoughts of a man prepared to undertake a great and precious charge, and setting his face stedfastly toward mastering the circumstances that should make him worthy of his new position. And in this relation the bitter and unfriendly words of Saunders Malcolmson, although very keenly felt, had but deepened his sense of responsibility in deliberately standing to his claim as Mary's plighted lover, and clinched his determination to show, even in the eyes of Saunders Malcolmson himself, that Mary's guileless instincts had enabled her to judge him more truly as a man, than Saunders's strong head and hard worldly experiences had allowed him to do. He had been careful all through to save as much off his wages as he could, and he had resolved to qualify himself for the best situation open to him in his own line of work. When he married, therefore, and took Mary away to live in a small half-floor in a two-storey house in Love Lane, in

the burgh of Innerebrie, it was quite understood that that would be their home for only a very few months. At the coming Whitsunday term, Willie had the absolute promise of a situation through an old master of his own; as, in point of fact, he was soon engaged as grieve on one of his farms, to Patrick Ellison Scurr, Esquire of Seggieden, a well-known advanced agriculturist and large dealer in prime cross cattle and black-faced sheep.

Willie Fraser and his wife had once and again discussed their projects and prospects in life; and as they sat quietly together at the close of a week's labour, the subject of their approaching removal came up once more.

"An' syne ye'll win oot amo' a' that steer o' unco wives an' ill-tonguet, ill-tricket littleanes, tum'lin' aboot an' rappin' at the door, an' blaudin' a'thing that will blaud, or fechtin' wi' ither i' the gutters, an' greetin'," said Willie, in view of the coming change.

"It 's nae the fowk's blame, I 'm sure," answered Mary. "They 're aye richt willin' to be neibourly wi' me. Only there 's nae convainience to lat bairns play themsells, or muckle fowk keep things snod."

"It 's you that I 've been vex't about aye, fan I minet upon 't, Mary," continued Willie Fraser, reflectively.

"Hoot," answered Mary, "I 'm only nae acquant wi' their wye yet. But I can mak' oot richt weel, though it 's maybe nae vera hame-like—'cep' fan ye 're here."

Mary crept closer to her husband's side, and looked up in his face with a confiding smile, while she hurriedly added the last clause of the sentence, as if to correct herself in the use of the expression that had immediately preceded it.

"Peer lassie!" The words were uttered with a touch of gravity about them, inasmuch as in Mary's smile, even, Willie fancied he could perceive the slightest appearance of sadness. "Peer lassie!"

"But I'm your happy wifie;" and Mary cast herself on the bosom to which she was forthwith fondly pressed.

Just then the outside door opened noisily, and a tremendously heavy and irregular footstep was heard on the stair, accompanied by a babblement of confused words.

"Fat's that?" exclaimed Willie Fraser, surprised and indignant at the uncouth and intrusive noise.

"Oh, never min'," answered Mary, "it's only the fowk but-an'-ben wi' 's. The man's files some the waur o' drink fan he comes hame."

"I canna stan' that, though; he'll brak' a' the doors i' the hoose."

"Jist hae patience a minute; fan ance he's in till's ain en', the noise winna be freely so ill;" and Mary laid her hand on her husband's arm, to prevent him carrying out his intention of opening the door, and accosting the originator of the uproar.

The truth was that the "fowk but-an'-ben" with Mary and her husband were persons whose habits did not, on the whole, betoken much of light and sweetness; and in particular toward the close of the week, when the head of the house, who worked as a sawyer, had got possession of his wages, he came home invariably, on one night at least, in a more or less advanced stage of drunkenness—the facts that his home had been where it presently was for only a short time, and that he could be there only at irregular intervals, accounted for Willie Fraser not being fully aware of all this. And it was contingent on a variety of circumstances how the man would behave himself at these times. Being what might be termed a cosmopolitan drinker, it was pretty much a matter of indifference to him whether he swilled ale or porter by the pint, or imbibed raw whisky by the glass and gill. These three liquors represented the range of his drinks; and it depended entirely upon the "company" for the

time being, and other incidental circumstances, such as the state of his finances, to which of them he would, on any given occasion, addict himself. There was a brewery handy, a great boon in itself, and especially if one happened to be on intimate terms with Tam Kettle, the working brewer, who at set times would allow his special cronies to sit on the deal "forms" in the "boxed-in" corner of the brewery floor, and drink at wholesale rates from a tin-pail full of reaming liquor. Then the small "Public," where "harder stuff" could be got, was quite accessible, and, as indicated, received its share of patronage with the utmost impartiality.

Now it turned out that just according to the course followed by the sawyer in getting drunk, was his behaviour when the process had been completed. If his drinking had been mainly at the brewery, he came home muddled—very greatly muddled—in the head, and altogether unsteady on the legs; otherwise his tendency was to a comatose state. And if got up the stair and to bed wholly or partially undressed, there was no further trouble with him—he slept heavily, if not soundly and sweetly, and awoke next morning in the enjoyment of sensations best known to himself. If, on the other hand, the sawyer had achieved inebriation through the medium of the gill-stoup exclusively, the crude adulterated whisky brought forth results that entirely corresponded with its own villianously fiery character. He came home with less unsteady gait it might be, but with such brain as he had in an actively volcanic state. The stage of vociferous hilarity came first, and next the stage of vociferous quarrelsomeness and determination to the utterance of abusive and blasphemous language, directed against all and sundry from whom he conceived his dignity to be in danger of receiving insult, including those most nearly related to him; which latter stage was usually prolonged far into the night, to the edification, not alone of his own wife and children, who

had first and chiefly to bear the brunt of his drunken explosions; for each and all of three other families who dwelt in the house could hear every outrageous word he uttered; indeed, unless they were remarkably sound sleepers, were compelled to hear it.

On the night of which indication has been given, the sawyer had taken refreshment at the Public; and he acted, as was his wont, in the circumstances. As being his first experience of the sawyer in this phase of him, a perfect tumult of feelings was naturally enough aroused in Willie Fraser's breast; nor was it allayed when he found the uproar going on with little or no abatement for long after the sawyer had entered his own domicile. In his indignation at periodically recurring yells of a very intolerable loudness, he had oftener than once started to his feet, determined to go and either quell, or take summary vengeance on the obstreperous savage; but was firmly, if gently, restrained by his young wife.

"Dinna meddle wi' 'm; ye 'il only mak' ill-will; an' we 'll seen be awa' oot o' this, ye ken."

"But the scoon'rel 's misca'in' an' ill-guidin' 's vera ain wife. Divnin ye hear 'er greetin'?" asked Willie.

"Ay; but for a' that *she* maybe wudna like to be pairt-ta'en by naebody against her ain man—mair nor *he* wud like it."

"Hoot, Mary! nonsense!"

"Ay, but hoot! tee. Fa wud like onything o' the kin' noo?" asked Mary, slyly.

"Weel, weel, your wye be 't, lassie. I suppose we maun jist thole the din o' 'im till he 's tir't 'imsel'."

"Ye wud only mak' mair mischief gin ye interfer't wi' them," said Mary, "an' dee nae gweed."

Mary's conclusion was sound, without doubt; and she had been helped in reaching it by observing with what particular care the sawyer's wife had been wont, after previous ebullitions of the same sort, to explain that her husband, poor man, had been suffering from

indisposition of a recurrent character, to which he was unhappily subject. And then, on general grounds, was not the house of the sawyer *his* castle also? and if other people's castles happened to be in such juxtaposition thereto as rendered his private doings uncomfortably audible to them, was that to be made a pretext for trenching on the inviolability of the sawyer's stronghold?

The safer way clearly was to let him alone; as we are satisfied every reader who has had practical experience of neighbours like the sawyer will admit; and he who has not had such experience, has yet something to learn of the domiciliary conditions under which many an honest man and woman must not unfrequently live. Willie Fraser and Mary did so, bearing with what patience they could the ruffianly din of the sawyer, which was continued over midnight of Saturday and a good couple of hours into Sunday morning, and comforting themselves with the thought that when they had got "flitted" away to the out-farm of Patrick Ellison Scurr, Esquire, at Seggieden, they would have their house by themselves, and be free of all such annoyances.

CHAPTER III.

SAUNDERS MALCOLMSON AT HOME.

That Saunders Malcolmson was a man of upright principle, and correct habits of life, was a thing that nobody who knew him would for a moment have called in question. Indeed, but for his own decided refusal, he might have occupied the position of an elder of the kirk; and had he chosen to accept that sacred function not a single parishioner would have dared to gainsay his fitness for it. As it was, although Saunders declined ecclesiastical office, the public verdict was altogether in his favour. True, the standard of judgment was not vitally affected by questions of ecclesiastical standing, or of religious principle. It was a very practical standard; and the estimate of a rational human life therein implied was of a very tangible and comprehensible sort.

Saunders Malcolmson had sat for the greater part of a "nineteen" in the "possession" of Skellach Brae. By his own industry and thrift he had carved out his position; for he too, as has been said, had occupied the place of a farm labourer, and in that capacity had amassed the means that enabled him to climb to the rank above it. He was an industrious, skilful, and successful farmer; whereas his predecessor in the "haudin" he occupied had fallen somewhat short in the latter particular at least. But that was not exactly the way in which Saunders's neighbours put it. What they said was in this wise—

"Weel, man, I ees't to think Skellach Brae a weird-

less scaup. Geordie Paip, they say, never did nae gweed upon 't."

"Haud yer tongue! Forbyse to dee gweed, he cudna deen muckle waur."

"Nae, man; he tyeuk-na naebody in, did he?"

"Na, na. Geordie was only owre honest for 'imsel', peer stock; but though he tyeuve and wrocht hard, late an' ear', he was nae han' at bargain-makin' an' that."

"An' that wye he made-na naething o' 't?"

"Naething. Aw doot he lost the muckle feck o' fat he hed."

"Yea, man; but aw b'lieve Skellie's deein' weel—makin' siller like sclate steens!"

"He 's deein' byous weel, min. Though he 's hed a faimily to fesh up and skweel—an' the like o' that canna be deen upo' naething—aw 'm maist seer he 's layin' by a puckle notes ilka year. Deein' weel! ay is 'e."

"Loshtie, man, he 'll be worth a hantle o' dry siller, forbyse 's cover, afore the tackie be oot."

"An oondeemas thing o' 't. Wi' the onwal man, fan a body gets a beginnin', it seen comes up."

"Weel, he begood bare aneuch."

"Bare aneuch. He hed naething but fat he made wi' 's twa han's. But he 's deein' oon-com-mon weel. Fat wud ye wauger but he 's layin' by half a rent, aff an' on?"

"Man, gin some o' 's cud win within sicht o' that, we wud think we wus a' richt."

They discussed a man's well or ill doing, you perceive, strictly in the light of his success in a pecuniary point of view. And in this they were by no means singular. The same rule, less plainly expressed it may be, obtains somewhat extensively in different sections of society; and it was a rule by which Saunders Malcolmson would, I verily believe, have been gratified to be judged, even as he himself would have judged others by it.

A notable thing in the matter was this:—Twenty-

five years previously, when Saunders Malcolmson was a young man of twenty to twenty-five, because he was not vicious—a spendthrift of his wages and the father of one or two bastards, but prudent in his conduct, and saving in his habits—they said he was a "weel-deein" lad. His character had not then taken fixed shape, but was in process of getting fixed. Now that it was fully consolidated, the qualification "weel deein," which in a way certified good moral character, had absolutely given place to "deein weel," which spoke purely of prosperity in secular things. It would have been deemed both superfluous and absurd to speak of Saunders Malcolmson as a "weel-deein" man now; yet might Saunders, like others, have fallen something short of "weel deein," in a moral point of view, and still have enjoyed to the full the credit of "deein weel."

Nevertheless, the rule of judgment referred to is not an altogether adequate or perfect one; and walking by it, and minding too exclusively "the same things," ultimately tended to embitter and sadden the life of Saunders Malcolmson far more than the events that happened to him rendered inevitable or necessary in themselves. As a "weel deein" youth, he had been able both to conduct himself properly in a social and moral point of view, and to acquire the means of elevating his position. As a man who was "deein weel," he had allowed his thoughts to be concentrated on the sordid process of steadily adding to his means on the line of the vantage ground already gained. And it was undoubtedly the lack of harmony between the set of his daughter's affections and the pecuniary prospects thereby opened up to her, as it seemed, and his own special operations in constructing his "pile," which gave the rude shock to his feelings and hazily defined hopes that had led him to behave with such unnatural harshness as he had done toward Mary and her chosen husband. When he was amassing money so satisfactorily for a man in his position, it seemed to him a

thing outrageously hard that his only daughter, to whom, in due season, her portion of those means would fall, should show no better appreciation of the value of his hoard than to throw herself away on a comparatively penniless youth, when she might have held herself in the market against offers of at least equal pecuniary value.

As regarded the outside public, Saunders was absolutely and rigidly silent on the subject. In the bosom of his family, in so far as he adverted to it in articulate fashion, he rather endeavoured to hold himself up as a very ill-used and somewhat heart-broken man. And in this way his indirect references to Mary's unfilial conduct were not infrequent.

"Ou weel, man, aw 'm seer ye 've naething to reproach yoursel' wi'," Margaret Malcolmson would say in reply. "Gin them that 's nearest till 's will rin their ain road we canna help it. They 'll jist hae to try an' winnow o' their ain cannas, an they 'll hae the mair credit themsel's gin they win to the gate o' their nain skeel come time."

"Ah-wa', 'oman, aw won'er to hear ye speak ; fat eese hed the like o' her mairryin' already ; an' mairryin' a wuddiefu, wi' nedder hame nor haul' o' 's nain."

"Deed, it 's tryin' aneuch ; but fowk maun leern to pit up wi' a hantle."

"Aw wuss to Gweed this toon hed never kent the face o' 'im."

"Weel, I 'm seer I 'm nae pairt-takin' them, man ; but ye ken he mith 'a been an ill deer ; ye sud min' that."

"A bonny reward for ony ane to mak', aifter bein' ees't as he was ; he cudna expeckit better guideship though he hed been ane o' oor nain faimily."

"Naething mair lickly nor that ; but he was a gweed servan', ye ken, an' carefu' o' the beasts ; an' naebody cud 'a been mair agreeable wi' the laddies."

"He was weel paid for 's wark ; an' I howp the

loons 'll keep clear o' the like o' 'im aifter this, unless *they* wunt to gae the black gate neist."

Saunders Malcolmson uttered these last words in a tone that induced his wife to drop the subject for that time, and which indeed checked the utterance of what might have drifted her further on in a certain direction than even she had any strict intention of going. As the perspicacious reader will have observed, Margaret Malcolmson's feelings, from the extreme of anger, had now got into at least a wavering state. It so happened that, despite their father's stern denunciations, and her own previous monitions on that subject, her two sons had continued to entertain a certain liking for their hated brother-in-law, as well as a keenly revived love for their only sister; and though open correspondence with Willie Fraser was strictly forbidden, the lads, as their mother very well knew, contrived somehow to keep themselves informed in a general way of his and their sister's ongoings. They had thus been able to tell their mother that Willie had got a situation as a grieve to Patrick Ellison Scurr, Esq.—a circumstance which Margaret Malcolmson, moved by a sort of not unpleasing impulse within her, had got to the very eve of placing before her husband with a kind of hopeful glow around it, as almost more than confirmatory of her previous remark concerning the possibility of the young people "winnin to the road," more or less, in course of time. Saunders's tone effectually checked the impulse, and the fact remained untold for the time.

When Margaret Malcolmson did inform Saunders of what seemed the improved prospect of their son-in-law, Saunders received the announcement with a sort of hard, unsympathetic grunt. He exhibited no desire whatever to be made further acquainted with the details of the matter; and a still more distinct proof, perhaps, of his obstinate alienation was found in the circumstance that though his wife tried once and again

to pave the way to it, he did not thereafter revert to the subject. In the character of Saunders Malcolmson, that element which has been described as the "stalk o' carl hemp," had not been wanting at any time; but the "dour" obstinacy now exhibited by him, took even his own wife aback, and made her doubt whether she had so fully understood the man as she had heretofore imagined. And, meanwhile, the more she mused on it, the more did she feel compelled to keep the subject of her musings to herself.

And thus the term of Whitsunday drew on; and Mary Malcolmson's immediate prospect was that of removing farther from her native place than she had ever yet been. It was but a matter of twenty five miles, but the means of communication were far from direct or certain, and to go where her new home was to be, seemed like severing herself utterly and conclusively from the home of her childhood and youth. To Mary it would have been a source of inexpressible comfort simply to know that she had the full forgiveness of her father and mother; how much more to see their faces in peace, and depart with their parental benediction. But this was not to be. Her mother had now come, in part at least, to feel what this alienation from a confiding, affectionate daughter signified to her own heart; and there was but a short step to be taken when she would gladly have clasped Mary to her bosom again. But there *was* an obstacle in the way; and such an obstacle as she had not yet seen the possibility of overcoming.

On the night previous to Willie Fraser and Mary leaving the region of Love Lane, the two youthful Malcolmsons, Mary's brothers, unexpectedly ascended the stair of their dwelling. They did not say they were come to bid them good-bye. On the contrary, they were at some pains to explain that it was their mother who had sent them to the brewery for a couple of pecks of "maut," and with a particular injunction

"nae to set aff owre lang by the road," which instruction they were heedful to fulfil. Still the main theme of their discourse had relation to the approaching departure of their sister and their brother-in-law.

"But we're maybe comin' to see you sometime," said the younger of the two lads, when they had discussed the subject so far. "Fader 's aye so ill-natur't aboot things, but my mither winna hin'er 's, I think."

"Weel, be sure an' nae forget to come, fan they can spare ye at hame," replied Mary, with lively emotion.

"It 's a middlin' lang road," remarked Willie Fraser, "but ye wud manag't brawly o' yer fit i' the simmer day."

"Ou, nae fears o' the road, gin that be a'," quoth the other and elder Malcolmson. Then he added abruptly—"This is a little bun'lie 't my mither bad 's gie ye; there 's holie-pie thingies in 't 't ye made yersel', but they 're siccar row't up, and ye needna apen 't oot eenoo an' you flittin'. She bad ye tak' gweed care o't."

As the lad spoke, he had, with some effort, pulled from his pocket a brown paper parcel, carefully wrapped about with stout worsted threads, which he handed to his sister. Mary Malcolmson, with pale face and trembling fingers, received the packet, which seemed to her saddened heart simply a tangible remembrance of happy days past, and of a relationship severed for ever in its true intents. Thereafter, the two brothers quickly left for their home.

CHAPTER IV.

SEGGIEDEN.

Patrick Ellison Scurr, Esq., was, as has been said, an advanced as well as an extensive farmer; indeed, a model agriculturist on a somewhat magnificent scale. On each of his farms—for he had three or four—he had got erected, at large expense, an improved "steading," embracing the newest appliances for the accommodation of his valuable herds of cattle. Unluckily P. E. Scurr, Esq., had not manifested quite the same care in providing for the proper housing of the human beings whose office it was to conduct the active every-day operations on his various farms. And thus it was that, when Willie Fraser and Mary Malcolmson had reached their new location, they found the house destined for their habitation to be a structure something short of elegant in aspect, and that did not seem to promise the maximum of comfort or convenience to those who were to live in it. In constructing the farm of which it formed an adjunct, it was clearly evident that two or three small farms had been absorbed in the like number of spacious fields; and the "grieve's house," which stood in the far corner of one of those fields was simply a ricketty remnant of an extinct "steading" of limited dimensions. The low clay-built walls were old, the straw-thatched roof was old, and the other parts corresponded. Standing where it did, there was no visible approach to it, except a foot-path by the dyke-side. The old cart track that had led up to the place had been ploughed over to increase the cultivated area,

and for the like reason, the garden allotment had been minimised to a patch at one end of the house capable of rearing about a score of "kail" plants.

But Willie Fraser was now a grieve; and he and his gentle little wife set about applying themselves to a right fulfilment of the duties of their new position with what heart they might. On the whole, the aspect of things did not strike them as being essentially different from what was to be expected in their circumstances; and with diligence in labour, and an earnest desire to please, their thoughts were made to rest more on their master's work than on their own immediate personal surroundings.

And so the summer passed on. Mary felt a little lonely at times; a stranger in a strange place, as she was, far removed from any neighbourhood, and her husband much absent—for his office being that of the useful functionary known as a "working grieve," his "hours" were longer than those of any other male servant upon the farm; if, indeed, it could properly be said that he had any recognised hours at all. If the other servants of Patrick Ellison Scurr, Esq., were bound to start promptly a-field at six *ante meridian*, they took care to close their working day as promptly at six *post meridian;* but while it was the grieve's business to be on the ground sufficiently early to see that they were timeously "a-yoke" in the morning, his charge was by no means over when they had "lows't" at night. If cattle on the pastures had to be seen to, if some extra hands had to be spoken for at the nearest village, or if, in short, any incidental requirement emerged in connection with the ongoings of the farm, then the grieve was expected to give immediate attention thereto; and as oftenest happened, this had to be done when, to others, the day's work had been completed. Still the grieve and his wife were happy in each other, and quite disposed to look at the hopeful side of things. Mary had bestowed infinite pains in the shape

of sand-scrubbing of sooty woodwork, whitewash, and a little amateur upholstering, to make their home look its best; and with fresh air, bright sunshine, green leaves, and gay flowers abundantly furnished by kind Nature, in the way of surroundings, one was almost tempted to say, "Well, after all, a somewhat dilapidated house is no great evil." But summer ended; and with a succession of wet and stormy days in the "go-harvest" it was seen that the roof leaked here and there above; while, through lack of drainage of any sort, there appeared a worse evil in the shape of an inflow of "un'er water" below. This was annoying, no doubt, but it must just be put up with, as others had put up with the like before; and perhaps the evil was only too lightly thought of, even by those most vitally concerned.

And then the promised visit from Mary's brothers—what of it? For weeks and months that visit had been matter of pleasant anticipation; but alas! the season was now closing in with the visit still unrealised, and the prospect of its realisation even less likely than before; for in the last brief note from the elder of the two lads, he had not so much as mentioned the proposal. Upon Mary the effect of this was depressing in a degree known to no heart but her own. It was clear to her now that her father and mother were as far as ever from entertaining thoughts of reconciliation with their daughter, whose affectionate heart so yearned for their sympathy. That then must be the bitter sorrow of her life; but why complain to her husband? Did it not seem like ingratitude to him, whose life was entirely devoted to her? And Mary strove to bear her burden in secret and alone.

Such were the circumstances when, on a certain "blae" autumn gloamin, Willie Fraser, on returning to his home, found that his wife had made him a father. The kindly female practitioner from the village, who was in attendance; who had, in fact, constituted herself

mistress of the situation; a woman of ready resources, with copious showers of tears at command when her emotions stirred within her; and who had clothed the latch of the door in flannel to muffle the noise of opening it, and taken all other needful precautions, assured him that Mary was "as weel 's cud be expeckit;" and then, in a whisper, the worthy dame continued, "an' it 's a lassikie; freely sober, peer thingie, but a richt brow, wisse-like creaturie 's ever was seen. Sit ye doon there; an' aw 'll fesh't ben jist eenoo and lat ye see 't. Mithna ye tak' aff yer tacketie beets at ance, an' stap yer feet in'o some bits o' aul' skushles, or gyang o' yer hose, for fear o' disturbin' 'er."

And after this fashion was the advent of Mary Malcolmson's first-born. Mary's recovery was neither very rapid nor very perfect; yet when the baby was a month old she had resumed all her household duties, and it was reckoned full time to have it christened. The excellent and kind-hearted old parson willingly made the journey to the grieve's cottage for that purpose. He christened the babe in the presence of three or four of those whom Willie Fraser and his wife had come to regard most in the light of friends and neighbours, assembled for the occasion. The judicious official already mentioned acted as a sort of mistress of the ceremonies throughout. Then, as was his wont when the christening was over, the old minister put a half-crown into the baby's breast for "hansel"; and then he sat for a little space, courteously partook of the dram offered, and spoke some "couthie" words, addressed chiefly to the baby's mother:—

"Margaret; that 's a pretty name. And who, may I ask, is the child named after?"

"My mither, sir."

"Ah! very good, very good; she 'll be glad to hear about her little grand-daughter, I 'll warrant. Your mother lives some distance away; has she any more grand-children?"

"No, sir."

"None!"

"No, sir."

"Wee Maggie will be her favourite then," said the worthy old parson, pleasantly. "You must take care she does not spoil her."

"Yes, sir," answered poor Mary, hardly knowing what she ought to say.

"Ah, well," continued the minister, "children are God's heritage. Who knows what a blessing that poor, helpless, innocent babe may be to some, after the heads of even the youngest as well as the oldest of us are covered by the dust of the graveyard! Consider it a high privilege, my friends, as well as a solemn responsibility, to have such a charge as that of this young and undisclosed life entrusted to you."

And then, after other suitable and friendly discourse, his reverence bade them all a kindly good night. The women folks, as they sipped their tea, failed not to comment on the "byous" nature of the minister's remarks. As a parson, he must naturally speak with some degree of unction at such a time, but it was generally admitted that, well as he usually did, he had on the present occasion fairly outdone himself.

When the christening party had gone, and her husband had left for the time to look after some odd jobs on the farm, Mary's thoughts reverted with great intensity to her parents and her parents' home. What would they think, and what would they say, when they knew both that this feeble wee bit specimen of humanity lived and breathed on its own account on this earth, and that its name was Maggie? Mary bent earnestly and affectionately over the poor little morsel now lying asleep in its cradle; and then she proceeded to ransack her humble chest of drawers for the purpose of carrying out some bit of work which her new circumstances as a mother had suggested as needful to be done. In so doing, she stumbled upon the parcel given

her by her brother last time she had seen him, and which the lad had described as containing some "holie-pie" work of her own. From a feeling that the opening of the parcel must be equivalent to stirring recollections of happy days unhappily lost, it had to that hour remained unopened — had in a manner been shrunk from, in fact. Moved by a more practical reason now, Mary untied the threads to get at the pieces of sewed muslin-work within. And as she unrolled those pieces down toward the centre, her feelings got keenly excited, as first one and then another well remembered little thing that she had handled or worn long ago, came unexpectedly to sight. At last there tumbled out a small tortoise-shell box, loosely wrapped in tissue paper. At sight of the little box Mary started, and her heart beat rapidly as she lifted it, and, divesting it of its covering, eagerly looked inside. Yes! There, amid its nest of soft cotton wool, was that old stoned ring which she had gazed on so often with childish veneration as something precious in itself, but doubly precious, because, as she had learnt from her mother, it had belonged to a grandmother whose days on earth were ended before hers had begun.

That unspeakably cherished ring in her unconscious possession all this time, and clearly by the will and act of her own mother, and none else! Well might the words of her brother, "She bad ye' tak' care o' 't," recur to Mary, and with a very different significance to that which they had seemed to carry with them when uttered. It was not merely that she, in her girlish vanity and ambition, had coveted the ring dearly; she knew that her mother, whose sole specimen of jewellery, with the exception of her own marriage ring, it formed, set an almost priceless value on the stoned ring, and only on very rare occasions would consent to its being taken from its place of safety in her own "drawers" for the purpose of being exhibited, or, as a special indulgence, worn by her for a brief and well-defined

space of time. What room now to doubt of her mother's strong affection for her, with that mother's most cherished treasure of a material kind thus silently conveyed to her so long ago? No wonder if the conflict of feeling in Mary's breast was strong, and no wonder that, after gazing earnestly on the ring, as bewildering thoughts of the past in rapid succession rushed through her mind, and pressing the little box to her lips, she should burst into a passionate flood of tears.

CHAPTER V.

A FAMILY SCENE.

The home of Saunders Malcolmson at Skellach Brae had become the reverse of a cheerful home. For the first few months after his daughter's marriage, Saunders's spirit had sustained him wonderfully under the feeling of an ill-used man righteously angry. But now that Mary was fairly away, and beyond easy reach, there by-and-by came home to Saunders, unbidden, a certain painful sense of loss. The thought would once and again flash into his inmost heart that, after all, his daughter was more vitally a part of himself than to be severed at the dictation of mere impulse, however strong, without leaving a grievous rankling void behind, which even growing prosperity in his worldly calling, could never altogether fill or soothe. Yes; the gentle, placid girl, that in all her life had never returned him an undutiful word, and to his angriest reproaches had replied only by heartbreaking sobs, had filled a larger, nearer place than Saunders, in the blindness of his passion, had realised.

Through the summer, Saunders Malcolmson had been moody in the extreme. His old form of indirect complaint had altogether ceased, and he seemed carefully to avoid the least reference to Mary and her husband. And his continued reserve on this point served to put a sort of embarrassing restraint upon the other members of his family, when otherwise their conversation would naturally have gone in that direction. In this state of matters, his sons had practically given up their

proposed visit to Seggieden, as finding no opportunity to broach the subject. Then there came by direct message, indirectly sent from Willie Fraser, the announcement that Mary had got a little daughter; and by-and-by, from Mary herself, a letter to her elder brother, bearing on the same subject.

It so happened that Margaret Malcolmson was temporarily absent from home, and the two boys stood by the window conning and commenting on the newly arrived letter, while their father sat on the "deece" reading the "News," all oblivious, as they imagined, of their ongoings.

"Eh, it 's gyaun to be ca'd Marget — Maggie" — exclaimed Donald, as he read.

"It 'll be aifter my mither aw 'll wauger," replied the other.

"Ay is 't, for Mary says 't 'ersel'; heely till aw read it oot. 'She is named Marget, after dear mother, and I think is like her'"——

"Pheuch! fat wye cud she ken that, an' it but a little wee creatur', hardly muckler nor a kittlin, aw reckon."

"I wud like richt to see 't ony wye," answered Donald.

"Sae wud I."

"Aw won'er gin 't 'll hae black hair or fite."

"Hoot, min, ye never saw a littleane wi' a black heid."

"Nae freely black, maybe; but Mary's heid 's black, ye ken," answered Donald.

"Weel," said Francie, "ye 'll need 'o read that to my mither ony wye, as seen 's she comes hame."

The two lads had carried on their conversation in a kind of half under-tone, fully reckoning on their father's indifference to the subject, and engrossment at the moment in another. They were, consequently, rather taken aback when the words fell on their ears—

"Lat me see that letter!"

The letter was handed over as desired, and the two boys looked on with a curious sort of interest, mingled with an air of incredulity, as they saw their father lay the newspaper down on his knee, and set on to an intent perusal of it. Nor when he had finished did Saunders seem in any hurry to give the letter up again. What the precise nature of the predominant feeling stirring within him may have been, it would not be easy to say. Saunders Malcolmson was not the man to give way to anything in the nature of sentimental weakness; yet it was evident that his mood of mind had at least undergone somewhat of a change from the time when the mere mention of Mary's name served to rouse his anger. Perhaps the new relationship in which he found himself—a grandfather, the head of a third generation—was awakening certain new thoughts, just as it opened up yet another aspect of human life. At any rate, Saunders Malcolmson's two sons found their puzzled cogitations cut short for the time in a very practical fashion.

"Gae 'wa noo an' maet oot yer beasts; an' see 't the feeders get plenty o' beddin'," quoth Saunders, bluntly addressing the lads, as he turned to the "News," while still retaining the letter in his possession.

The order was obeyed, and the two youths had gone but a few minutes when their mother returned home.

"Here 's a letter fae Mary, 'oman," said Saunders, exhibiting the letter as he spoke, soon after his wife had entered.

"Ou, yea! Fan got ye 't?" exclaimed Margaret Malcolmson, with some surprise.

"It cam' to Donal', aw b'lieve, i' the forancen."

"An' are they brawly; or hae ye read it yet?"

"H—m, weel aw tyeuk a glimsh o' 't," said Saunders, with half-averted look.

"Ye mith read it oot, man, at ance, an' lat 's hear aboot the creaturs."

Margaret Malcolmson spoke with earnestness, not to

say anxiety, in her tone; and Saunders felt that her request could not well be denied, inasmuch as although his wife was very far from an ignorant woman, she was, as she herself would have phrased it, "nae scholar," and thus unequal to the task of deciphering Mary's letter. Still it was with something of an effort that Saunders could compel his organs of speech to obey his wavering will, as he read :—

DEAR BROTHER,

I write these few lines to tell you about our little baby which you know we have gotten. It has grown a good bit already, and will soon be noticing everything. It was christened last Saturday, and is named Marget—after dear mother, and I think is like her. The minister is a very kind man, and gave her half-a-crown. He said my mother would call her Wee Maggie. I hope she will see her some time.

I would like very much to see you, but winter is beginning now. We like this place very well, but it is some langsome, and nobody near us: it will be worst when the frost and snow comes. We are quite well, except myself not very strong, but some better. If you like, would you tell mother what I have said? And tell her I took good care of what you mind you gave me, and with kind love to all at home,

I am, your affectionate sister,

MARY.

P.S.—Please write soon, and bid Francie write, too. This letter is for you both; and please tell me how mother and all at home are.

Saunders Malcolmson did not perhaps read every word set down here, brief as Mary's letter was; yet he could not avoid reading in its main drift the simple epistle of his daughter. And the exercise seemed a sufficiently embarrassing one for him. His wife, as he stumbled on, listened with undisguised emotion, and when Saunders had made a final pause, she said—

"Lat me see 't in'o my nain han'."

Saunders Malcolmson handed over the letter as desired, and again professed to fix his thoughts on the columns of the newspaper. Perhaps his feeling was

that he had gone just a little too far in the direction of mawkish sensibility, and so must pull up. After a couple of minutes' pause, he threw down the newspaper, which lay still on his knee, seized his head gear, and rose to leave the house for his ordinary out-door avocations.

"It's jist her vreet, peer thing," said Margaret Malcolmson, in a sort of half-soliloquy, as she gazed at the letter a second time; "an' some or ither o' ye 'll need to vreet till *her* vera seen. Aw howp she 'll be stronger again ere lang, for she winna be wuntin' 'er chairge noo; an' nae ane 't 's drap's bleed to them within reach fan onything gaes vraug."

Saunders Malcolmson spoke not good or bad. The time was not long gone past when, in all likelihood, he would have uttered words of angriest import if his wife had ventured to say what she had just then said in his hearing. But in so far as unquiescent feelings existed within him now, I rather think they took the form mainly of dissatisfaction with himself; not by any means the most hopeless frame of mind into which it is possible for a human being to get, little conducive as it may be to that latent assurance of well-desert which comes of the self-conscious feeling that we are doing our ortho-lox part in the discharge of all those duties that imply no sacrifice of comfort or inclination, and no thwarting of our will. But then Saunders Malcolmson had his own full share of dogged northern reserve; and, if nothing special intervened, it would certainly take some time yet before his mind would work round to the point of giving perfectly free expression to the thoughts that had begun to force their way upward upon him.

CHAPTER VI.

A JOURNEY TO SEGGIEDEN.

"Weel, Mary 'ersel wasna vera stoot fan we heard a fyou ouks syne; an' we're jist some anxious to get anither letter."

These words were uttered by Margaret Malcolmson in reply to the friendly query of a neighbour woman, wife of the farmer of Sprotston; and Margaret Malcolmson added—

"Ye see she's far awa', an' oot amo' kent fowk; an' we've baith been thinkin' a gweed hantle aboot 'er livin' sae muckle by 'ersel' throu' the deid o' the winter."

"It's a caul' up-throu place aw b'leive; an' Mary was never jist fat you wud ca' unco hardy," was the reply. "Aw dinna won'er nor ye sud be gey concern't aboot 'er. She's a' the lassie 't ye hae, 'oman; an' a richt naitral-hertet creatur was a' 'er days."

When the next letter came the winter had just begun to give place to spring. It was not from Mary, but from her husband. It, too, was written to one of Saunders Malcolmson's sons, and not to Saunders himself or his wife, although its contents were pretty evidently meant quite as much for the heads of the house as for the sons. Things being as they had up to that date been, it was not to be expected that Willie Fraser could write with other than a feeling of restraint to any member of the Skellach Brae household: yet he indicated with sufficient distinctness that Mary was not improving in strength, as could be wished, and, indeed,

was now in a state which made it a tax on her energies to attend to her small household duties, and bestow due care on her infant child.

"Weel, man, gin ye war throu wi' the hurry o' the ait-seed, ye maun jist tak' twa days' leasure, and lat me win to see them; for I can-not hae patience langer."

Saunders Malcolmson did not indicate any disposition to resist this proposal; but it was now only a week or so past the end of February; the "ait-seed" was not even begun, and almost six weeks would in all probability elapse before it could be carried into execution. And a less space of time than six weeks may bring about events that affect us in a momentous fashion. So it was in this case. March had run its course, April was just begun, and Saunders Malcolmson in the very "heid-hurry" of oat-sowing, when a stranger was one day seen approaching Skellach Brae—a man of Highland aspect, roughly clad, with a faded shepherd-tartan plaid about his shoulders, and riding a shaggy pony of rather diminutive bulk. It was not yet nine o'clock by a full half-hour, for Saunders Malcolmson had but finished his breakfast, and was about to return a-field where he had been busy sowing. The dew of a quiet and sunny April morning still lay on the grass, and the laverock poured its strains of rich melody overhead.

Certainly the "unco" man on the hairy "shaltie" was coming there. There could be no doubt of the fact; for he had turned up the rough cart-track that led by the park "yett," and the pattering footfalls of his pony became quickly the most audible sounds in that quiet and beautiful scene where nature was presenting herself to man in her most hope-inspiring phase. The man pulled up his shaltie at the front of Saunders Malcolmson's dwelling, and there was a formal pause of nearly a minute's duration. The stranger asked if this was Skellach Brae, and being answered in the affirmative by Saunders Malcolmson himself, he said—

"An' ye're Saun'ers Malcolmson?"

"It's a' 't 's for me."

"Eh, man, aw 've ill news to tell ye!"

"Is—is she waur?"

"It 's nae her ava, man."

"My dother—Gweed be thankit! Fat 's happen't?"

"Yer gweed-sin 's fell't!"

"Gweed forgi'e ye, man!" exclaimed Margaret Malcolmson, bursting from the door, inside which she had caught the drift of the conversation, as she went to and fro at her work. Faur come *ye* fae? Did ye see Mary? Oh! tell 's, tell 's, man, fat 's happen't?"

The stranger, who bore himself with a very serious and really sympathising air, although his manner of introducing the melancholy tidings he professed to carry might have seemed to savour of unfeeling bluntness, proceeded to narrate how on the previous day a couple of spirited young horses, belonging to Patrick Ellison Scurr, Esq., at Seggieden, had got restive in the hands of the man who was driving them; and under his harsh mode of treatment had gone over the traces, and were plunging wildly about, with every appearance of forthwith trampling down or otherwise mastering, and at least seriously injuring, if not imperilling the life of the man, when Willie Fraser rushed to his aid; and going incautiously near, one of the horses struck out its iron-shod foot, hitting him on the chest, and knocking him down mortally injured. The blow, it was believed, had been the result more of terror through the ill-usage the animal had previously received at the hands of its driver than of native viciousness of temper; and hence the unfortunate grieve had been less guarded in approaching it than he might otherwise have been. At anyrate, the terrible result had come all the same. And when further help arrived, and Willie Fraser had been carried to the soft bank at the side of the field, and there laid down, while they doubted if he were alive or dead, he could only utter in broken whispers, "Mary! Oh, Mary! my ain! God bless you. Tell them to be

kin' till 'er." And Willie Fraser neither spoke nor breathed again.

"Licht ye doon, man, an' come in. Oh, sirs!" exclaimed Margaret Malcolmson, "it 's nae eese to speer for her; peer thing, it 'll kill 'er!"

The stranger threw his long leg high over the little shaltie's ears, as it eased its neck in the slackened bridle rein, and stood on his own feet on *terra firma*. He followed Margaret Malcolmson inside the house, and the shaltie, well content to have release from its burden, and the hope of something to fill its hungry stomach, willingly followed the guidance of Donald to the spare sta' in Saunders Malcolmson's stable. An order which speedily followed, and which Donald had forthwith to carry out, was to go to the field, where sowing had been going on, and tell the servant-man to "lowse" and send home the grey gelding immediately; the other might be used to cart back the unsown "lades" to the barn; for with only a single harrow at work, there was space enough seeded for some days to come; and, meanwhile, the grey gelding was required on more urgent business.

Two hours later, and Saunders and Margaret Malcolmson had started on a melancholy journey. There they were; Saunders driving the stout grey gelding, and Margaret Malcolmson in her darkest Sunday dress, seated amongst the straw in the cart, surrounded by the needful supplies of food for the gelding, and by a wonderful quantity of all those forms of linen and woollen manufacture which female instinct had selected as right and suitable in the circumstances, but which uninstructed male reason need not attempt to describe. Wonderfully little had been said; even as to the details of needful preparation, Saunders Malcolmson and his wife seemed to have simultaneously acted on the injunction—"Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might." And they were now on their way to far-off Seggieden; a place that neither the one nor

the other had ever seen. The stranger had staid to rest him a little: more to rest and fully refresh his shaltie. But he would speedily overtake them, he said; at anyrate he would "be up wi' them" long before they had passed kent bounds, and begun to doubt of the proper route to follow; and he duly fulfilled his promise, for the shaltie was a nimble trotter when it chose.

And then the stranger of Highland aspect once more performed the easy operation of dismounting from his saddle; for he would walk a bit to stretch his own legs, and give the shaltie corresponding relief from its burden. As for the faded tartan plaid, it could easily be, and it was, cast into the cart beside Margaret Malcolmson, and what else was there contained.

They journeyed on hour by hour. Sometimes the two men walked; sometimes the stranger re-mounted his shaltie, and Saunders Malcolmson took his place on the "forebreist" of the cart; sometimes, too, the stranger, as a second alternative, took a turn in the cart as well. They did not talk much: quite the reverse. With Saunders Malcolmson and his wife, of course, the predominating thoughts went deep enough to restrain free utterance on any subject. The stranger, as has been said, seemed to be a sympathising person. He had delivered his sad tidings with all gravity, and by snatches re-delivered the chief points oftener than once; but he had not acquired the faculty of laying down general principles, or moralising at length for the benefit of those whose deepest emotions must needs be reading them a far more solemn lesson than his words could do. The native *gentle*manliness of the man taught him the unfitness of all that. He, in his simple way, felt it incongruous, moreover, to introduce extraneous subjects, even in such forms as those of objects of interest passed on the way, except it were in terms of the utmost brevity, and almost dryness of tone. Of course, as he knew more or less of various of these,

while his companions knew nothing, a few words might be allowed, but only a few, in the way of stating the bare facts. Then, as neither the weather nor the state of the crops could fitly be discussed in a formal way, again silence would ensue. Happily not all along however. For why—was there not the shaltie which, by the wonderful journey of twenty-five miles on that late night and early morning, a journey now in process of being doubled step by step by the shaltie on those small hairy legs of its own, with but a very partial rest between, had, so to speak, brought itself fully *en rapport* with the circle involved in this mournful tragedy? Margaret Malcolmson was not sparing in words of pitying kindness towards the shaltie; and its master, once started on that key, bore unstinted testimony to its remarkable qualities, which, along with high endurance and wonderful sagacity, included a determined proclivity toward an astonishing series of half-pawky and wholly mischievous tricks. It was both a "wily" and a "wicket little won'er," as its personal qualities and social habits fully testified. In short, the description of the shaltie's qualities culminated in the phrase, "It's a terrible ted," oft repeated by its master, the man of Highland aspect, as they moved on. He had evidently attached to his four-footed companion a very definite individuality. And no doubt the shaltie's character found its most pronounced illustration for the time when they had "lowsed" the cart behind a range of stately pines to feed and rest. During that process, the shaltie not merely bearded the grey gelding, by deliberately stealing the best tufts of fresh clovery hay from under his very nose, but, when the huge cart horse put back his ears, and, extending his big head, snapped his front teeth in scowling threat at the impudence of his diminutive companion, deftly evaded him, and quickly lifting its fore hoof, with an angry little scream, actually made the frightened gelding start backward from his feed.

"Noo, didna I tell ye; saw ye ever the like o' that, the ted?" quoth the admiring owner of the shaltie. "Back roun' there, noo, ye little smatchet;" and the shaltie suffered reproof by being pushed round from its acquired vantage ground accordingly.

Then they re-yoked the cart and journeyed on for three hours more. And it was sundown of that long April day when Margaret Malcolmson and her husband reached the out-farm of Patrick Ellison Scurr, Esq., at Seggieden.

CHAPTER VII.

THE GRIEVE'S HOME.

What is it, Oh Saunders Malcolmson, that makes thee approach that humble straw-thatched cot, with its quiet surroundings and solitary aspect, so uncertainly? It is to that spot, without doubt, thy long journey hath tended; thither that thine own wife, Margaret Malcolmson, but a short time ago, hurried away with anxious step while thou wert busy housing the grey gelding for the night, under direction of the homely man who owns the shaltie, and who has been at pains to point out to thee where to go and what to do thus far. It is there that thine own child Mary waits, with heart so broken, bereaved, and desolate, that all human sympathy were but a drop to fill the void.

And yet Saunders Malcolmson felt that his step had more of the laggard and faltering in it than he could have desired, had it been possible for him as things stood to shape his thoughts into active form. The descending shades of night, that were beginning to envelop the grieve's cottage at Seggieden as he drew near to it, were not ungrateful to the mood of his spirit, albeit he instinctively groped after the dawning of some inner light of which he had yet seen no glimpse. He was now at the little rude gateway that admitted the visitor within the cottage enclosure; and now at the door of the cottage itself. Absolute silence reigned within and all around, except what noise his own footfalls made. And no human presence stirred to bid him welcome there. It was with a certain feeling

of hesitancy, and even of "eeriness," that Saunders Malcolmson slowly lifted the latch, pushed back the door, and stooped under the low lintel to enter the cottage, in whose dimly defined interior one might not clearly discern what or who were present. To Saunders Malcolmson it gave a feeling of partial relief, as he paused in shutting the door, to hear at last, in a low whisper, from the lips of his own wife, the words, "Come awa', man;" and he groped his way inward to the place where she seemed to be.

In the cottage, when Saunders Malcolmson entered it, the only living occupants were Mary, her mother, and her child. The neighbourly women who had come to Mary's aid during the day had left for their own homes, and she sat with her head laid on her mother's bosom, perfectly silent, but for her quick and heavy breathing. When Saunders Malcolmson had reached the centre of the floor by the aid of the dim gloamin' light, Mary rose and flung herself on his arm, uttering only the one word, "Fader!"

Even by one word the stern goodman of Skellach Brae failed to respond; he merely put his other hand over his daughter's neck, and stood stock still, contriving to make his own strongly-embarrassed feeling palpable, dark as it was.

"Mithna we licht the lamp noo!" asked Margaret Malcolmson, after a pause, and desirous of bringing the trying scene to an end.

The lamp was lighted accordingly, and Saunders Malcolmson sat in the chair in the corner beyond it, taking in at first glance the chief contents of the whole little place. But—what! Could that stooping figure, with wasted cheek and languid step, that now met his view, be his own daughter? Mary was calm, with a painful and unnatural calmness, and her eyes, which seemed to shine more brightly than they had ever done before, were perfectly tearless; but now that she made haste as she could to prepare tea for her parents, the

earnest attention of both was fixed upon her feeble movements, and sadly-changed appearance. And then the eyes of Saunders and Margaret Malcolmson met with a glance that spoke more significantly than words could. Mary was indeed a mournful sight to see—a mere ghost of her former self physically; evidently far gone in pulmonary disease, and with a terrible shadow darkening her crushed spirit.

And what of her child? The poor thing by and by gave audible tokens of its presence, and wish for temporary removal from the cradle. A puny, sickly-looking creature; and how could it be other? Unconscious of much about it nearly affecting its own little history, did not that strangely premature look of care on the wee wan face affect thee, Saunders? And was it not even more touching to see it, after a time of earnest gazing at the strangers, exchanged for a sort of grave passing smile, as Wee Maggie, moved by some incipient idea of her own, turned to bury her face in her poor mother's bosom?

"Weel-a-wins, my peer innocent," exclaimed Margaret Malcolmson with intense earnestness as she bent over and patted the child.

Saunders merely gazed on the infant with a fixed and troubled look.

The burial of Mary Malcolmson's husband was arranged to take place on the next day but one. The homely man who rode the little rough shaltie had looked in once and again, saying little, but with an evident disposition to make himself useful; and when the day of burial had been fixed, he had offered the remark to Saunders, "Never ye min', man, I'll tak aboot the graif, an' that."

The corpse was laid out in the "but" end of the house, and there the "kistin'" took place. They said it was "a bonnie corp," and that he was "richt like himsel'," as to each successive comer the face cloth was lifted for a last look of the dead. I do not know all

what Saunders Malcolmson felt at this time. When Mary first led him "but," and in her terribly calm tone asked, "Wudnin *ye* like to see Willie, noo, fader?" Saunders had absolutely started, though his answer meant more that he would, than that he would not. And Saunders looked steadily and long on the now rigid features of the man whom he had two years before spurned from him in such hot anger. As he stood and looked at the inanimate clay, he felt that the essential part that inhabited the familiar form had gone beyond his reach for ever for good or evil, and the thought, silently developed as he gazed, seemed to engross his whole consciousness for the time.

It was not once, nor even twice, that Saunders Malcolmson stood by the corpse and intently gazed on the still face; and when the coffin lid was to be screwed down he was there to look a final look, and anxious to see that everything was done decently and in order.

The funeral procession was humble enough, and yet in its sober and decent ordering there was nothing that seemed needful lacking. The worthy old minister who had christened Wee Maggie conducted the simple religious ceremony; the parish mortcloth, black by original intent, but brown and threadbare by age, had been brought there by the care of the wright, authorised and instructed, as he had said, by the bellman. It was carefully spread over the coffin, which was placed upon two wooden "spokes" and carried to the churchyard, a mile and a-half distant, the bearers, members of the funeral company, relieving each other by the way.

As they passed on, the dog-cart of Patrick Ellison Scurr, Esq., came along the road, and the occupant of the dog-cart descending therefrom, accompanied the burial procession to the kirkyard, which by that time they were nearing. It was regarded as rather an event that he should do so by those who knew Mr. Scurr's habits and general procedure in such matters.

At the grave, the great agriculturist, having ascer-

tained Saunders Malcolmson's identity and relationship to the deceased, approached him with what he no doubt regarded as appropriate speech :—

"It 's a sair bizness this, man—I 'm vera sorry for 't, I can tell ye."

"Ay, it 's a sair bizness," said Saunders.

"I wud 'a raither onything nor it hed happen't ; an' the sizzon jist comin' on tee."

As a man who could appreciate the disadvantage of interruptions to work in the busy season, Saunders could not fail to understand the position ; but somehow the words that fell on his ear seemed less in place than he could well realize, as he answered in a mechanical way, that he "cud weel b'lieve 't."

"It 's a great disappointment to me, I can tell ye," continued Patrick Ellison Scurr, Esq., dwelling on the theme. "Ay is 't. He was a vera carefu', cawpable man, an' they 're nae aye easy gotten."

To this Saunders Malcolmson made what answer he could, but Mr. Scurr was not exacting in the matter of reply in such cases, and he went on—

"He was ane that wud 'a risen, man ; ay wud he. He kent wark fan he got it, an' he was a judge o' beasts tee." Then he wound up as before—"It 's a great disappointment to me, I can tell ye." And then, without further remark of any sort, he turned away to meet his conveyance, now approaching the kirkyard gate, leaving Saunders Malcolmson to digest these his utterances at leisure.

They had filled up the grave and replaced the green sod, and the company had begun to drop away before it occurred to Saunders Malcolmson that his friend, the owner of the shaltie, had been acting the chief part in the interment. He now stood with his shovel in his hand and the folded morteloth under his arm. The old minister, who had walked alongside Saunders directly behind the coffin, with a few words of grave discourse, now shook hands and kindly bade him good-

day; and then Saunders and his friend were left alone by the kirk gable. Just wait a minute, the man had said, till he would put past his things and lock the kirk door; and Saunders waited. Then the bellman, for in truth he was so, invited the stranger into his dwelling. Then he paid the small dues of the bellman as grave-digger, and then the bellman and his wife pressed him to rest "'imsel'," as the manner is, and have some refreshment. "Na," said Saunders, "Nae the day; aw'll awa' owre the gate again."

"Heely 'll I fling on my coat than, an' I'll convoy ye doon the road," answered the bellman, who, in his own way, felt for the lonely stranger burying his dead.

The bellman meant his "ilka-day's" coat; for in truth he had, out of respect for the departed, arrayed himself in his "Sunday claes," although compelled by the requirements of the case, and the general discomfort inflicted as he went about the work of filling the grave, to lay down his long hat and coat by the dykeside. So he now "flung on" his grey coat and his bonnet, and that done, leisurely "convoyed" Saunders three-fourths of the way back to the grieve's cottage.

CHAPTER VIII.

P. E. SCURR, ESQ., AT HOME.

THE funeral over, it remained with Saunders Malcolmson to think of what had next to be done. His interview with Patrick Ellison Scurr, Esq., abrupt in its commencement, and equally abrupt in its termination, had afforded him no opportunity of arranging the matters needful to close the connection between that celebrated agriculturist and his deceased son-in-law. Next day, therefore, Saunders Malcolmson had no help for it but seek out Mr. Scurr, at the Mains farm, two miles distant, where his residence was. And a handsome residence Saunders found it to be. In Saunders's immediate locality there were no such farm houses; it wore the air rather of a mansion-house, indeed, standing, as it did, on a knoll, at two hundred yards distance from the spacious farm-stead, amid shrubbery surroundings, and with a pleasant lawn and flower garden in front.

Saunders Malcolmson had been accustomed to "traffike" with some sort of recognised standing among farmer "bodies" of his own class. He was in his way a successful man; and that very idea of success which had lodged itself in his mind is apt, in the absence of some proper moral counteractive, to lead a man, consciously or unconsciously, to centre his feelings of consideration and respect upon those who have gained a yet higher measure of success than his own. He knows his position among those who are merely his fellows, and easily assumes it. To conciliate the good opinion

and regard of the men he recognises as superiors is alike grateful and satisfactory. That Saunders Malcolmson, with all his sturdiness of character, had not quite escaped this tendency was, I fear, true. Yet, as he now approached the Mains farm, his feeling of personal insignificance was only equalled by his sense of shrinking from the presence of a notably successful man. His impressions were not radically changed by the scene in which he was just about to act his part.

The house at the Mains farm had two doors, like any other modern residence, one for the kitchen in the rear, the other the front or "entry" door. After debate within himself as to which door he should call at, Saunders Malcolmson bent his steps toward the latter, where he made his desire to see the master of the place known to the florid servant maid who answered his modest "chap," and who unceremoniously left him where he stood, whilst she went in person, or by deputy, to seek for Mr. Scurr, an operation which occupied some ten minutes, that gentleman having gone a short distance a-field. In the meanwhile, several well-grown young ladies came round from the west end of the house, where they had been occupied in gardening, and pursued their operations in the flower plots near by where Saunders Malcolmson stood, but without interrupting their conversation, or taking the slightest notice of his presence, beyond a casual stare. By and by Mr. Scurr had been discovered, and came stumping round, a sandy-haired man of middle age, dressed in a grey tweed suit, with an immense white hat of the soft felt type, and leather leggings. As soon as he approached, one of the young ladies burst forth in a voluble address to "Papa," concerning sundry things interesting to herself personally, and on which she proceeded to "instruct" papa fully before opportunity was given to poor Saunders Malcolmson of uttering a single word. Saunders had no choice but wait his time.

"A fine day, man," said Patrick Ellison Scurr, Esq., as soon as he was granted release, and not perfectly certain apparently who the man might be whom he was addressing. Saunders Malcolmson replied that it was "a *fine* day," and then he paused.

"Ou ay—ye're Fraser's gweed-fader. I'm vera sorry for ye, man; vera sorry. It was a great disappointment to me, ye ken."

Saunders Malcolmson did not doubt it; it would have been unreasonable if he had, after the assurances given: and he ventured to express his belief that there were also others who would feel the loss.

"Ye'll be come to get fat was yauchtin 'im, are ye?"

"Weel, an' it be a' the same to you, Maister Scurr," said Saunders, "we mith mak' a sattlement; it's a lang road atween this an' oor pairt."

"Come ye awa' in than, man."

Patrick Ellison Scurr, Esq., strode toward the front door and ascended the three steps that led to it; and then a thought struck him:—

"Of coorse, I'll lippen to you clearin' onything that's due at this time, ye ken—the doctor an' that?"

"Ou I'll see a'body paid afore I gae awa'."

"Aw dinna doot it, man, aw dinna doot it; but the law's strick, ye ken, an' ony o' them mith reest the siller in my han'—I've nae doot o''t—gin they war timorous: or aiven gi'e tribble aboot it aifterhin—My wife. This is some o' that peer unfortunate lad Fraser's freens, 'oman."

Mrs. Scurr, a buxom matron, as she pointed Saunders Malcolmson to a seat in the large and comfortably-furnished parlour, launched out rather copiously into a series of comments on the unhappy circumstances attending the death of the late grieve at Seggieden; the general imbroglio and risk to animal life and valuable property occurring through the incapability or culpable recklessness of a single man, besides the actual death of a human being that had resulted; and she consider-

ately added that, but for the knowledge that it was too late to prevent or remedy this last, and her general sensitive shrinking from "deith," she would have personally visited the grieve's desolate abode, for, by her husband's testimony, he was a man who had merited even that—had no reasons to the contrary existed.

"Ay, he's a rash chap the secon't horseman owre by; but fowk maun jist tak' their risk wi' the like o' 'im, an' it's nae little. That's a pair o' beasts cudna be pitten yon'er for eighty poun', man. Fraser ken't the man hed to be cheeng't; an' we'll need to get anither in's place at the term ony wye. Foo muckle was ye makin' 't oot to be, man?"

Mr. Scurr, as he spoke thus, had risen from his chair and gone to his desk; and Saunders understood rightly that the question was how much he expected to receive as Willie Fraser's remaining wages.

"Weel, Maister Scurr, ye ken that better nor me," answered Saunders.

"Twal poun' for the half-year, ye ken; the same waage simmer and winter; an' the hoose and the yaird, wi's bow an' sap money."

"An' Awpril was hardly an ouk run," interposed Mrs. Scurr.

"Ou weel, 'oman, we winna coont hard upo' that; he was a gweed servan' to me, peer man. We'll mak' it the four month an' a half; nine notes for the fee an' the lave confeerin'. That coonts aff only sax ouks, an' ye ken it's a gweed seyven ouks yet to the term."

And on this liberal scale Patrick Ellison Scurr, Esq., adjusted the payment, which he forthwith made to Saunders Malcolmson as representing the deceased Willie Fraser and his.

"The hoose?" added Mr. Scurr in reply to a further suggestion of his wife. "Weel, I'm sure I'll mak' yer dother rael welcome, man, to bide in't till the term, an' she likes. It's be in nae ane's poo'er to disturb her till than. No; it's be in nae ane's poo'er to disturb 'er."

Saunders Malcolmson expressed all needful gratitude for this fresh proof of the philanthropic disposition of Mr. Scurr; and that gentleman, holding the business part of the interview to be ended, laconically added, glancing towards his wife—

"Dram, an' a bite o' a piece, 'oman."

Mrs. Scurr, whose manner was more diffuse, and likewise more modern, so to say, than that of her husband, wished to know if Saunders would drink port or sherry, or——

"'T a gless o' fusky, 'oman, to the piece o' 's, an' a bit breid an' cheese."

And this half impatient utterance of Mr. Scurr saved Saunders from a real dilemma. He was not accustomed to a choice of wines, and would have felt the good lady's complete list embarrassing.

When they had "wuss't" each other health, Mr. Scurr, who now naturally turned to social topics of a personal kind, enquired—

"Hae ye a bit placie o' yer nain, man?"

"Ay; a little placie."

"A twa-horse wark, maybe? or dee ye make it oot wi' ae beast an' an owse?"

"It's owre fifty awere—we need twa horse beasts."

"That's a gey bit tackie, man; ye'll need a chap fit to haud the plench, forbye yersel'?"

"Ay; we need aye some ane."

"I'm seer ye will; ye'll keep twenty heid o' nowte beasts aff an' on."

Again Saunders answered in the affirmative, and the next question was as to the precise location of his farm. That stated, Mr. Scurr was in a position to diagnose the whole matter. He knew the estate of which Skellach Brae formed a part, and he knew the owner of it: he knew the quality of the soil and the style of farming in the locality: and he knew even more than that.

"Man, I 've seen your face i' the markets at Inner-

ebrie; I 'm seer o' 't," said Mr. Scurr, turning full upon Saunders to look at him.

Saunders conceived it possible. Of course he had often seen the face of Patrick Ellison Scurr, Esq., in the markets named; for where was he not known; but that was a very different thing from Mr. Scurr having seen his face and attached a separate individuality to its owner. However that might be, the field now opened up might have been cultivated to any extent in the way of discussing lan', and beasts, and rent, had it so suited the great man. But Mr Scurr's time was valuable; and, accordingly, when he had finished his dram, he again turned abruptly to his wife, and proceeded to direct her about giving instructions to have his conveyance brought to the door in half-an-hour from that time. That done, he went on at once to discourse to Mrs. Scurr in detail about various personal transactions with people of whom Saunders Malcolmson had never in his life heard. Saunders, after some minutes had passed in this way, not unnaturally felt that his presence might be dispensed with; and he according rose to leave.

"It 's been a great disappointment to me, I can tell ye. Ye 're gweed-sin wud 'a been a vaeluable man, gin he hed been sparet, man. But tell ye the widow that she 's welcome to keep the hoose till Whitsunday; there sall nae ane tribble 'er till the term-day."

With these words Mr. Scurr dismissed his visitor; and Saunders Malcolmson went on his way, pondering dimly and with a certain shade of perplexity in his thoughts on the absolute greatness of such a man as Patrick Ellison Scurr, Esq., and the comparative, as well as absolute, insignificance of persons who had merely attained to such social standing as one could lay claim to who was master of a "placie" like Skellach Brae.

CHAPTER IX.

SAUNDERS MALCOLMSON GOES HOME ALONE.

Saunders Malcolmson had been four whole days absent from Skellach Brae; the fifth day was running, and he was naturally anxious to be home; for during all those long years that Skellach Brae had known him as its master, he had never been away from it two days on end before. But what of Mary and her child? It had been Saunders's intention, promptly determined in his own mind, to get the modest furnishings in the grieve's house forthwith put in charge of some trustworthy person to be disposed of, and then carry Mary and Wee Maggie home along with himself and his wife. Two difficulties, unanticipated by him, came in the way. In the first place, now that the funeral was over, the state of extreme and unnatural tension in which Mary had been held, both physically and mentally, was succeeded by reaction equally extreme. She was completely prostrated, and totally unable to attend to her own wailing infant, through sheer weakness. And when the doctor was consulted on the point, he at once declared that it would be perfect madness to attempt to remove her. By any conveyance that Saunders could command she could not be taken half the distance from Seggieden to Skellach Brae in her present low and fevered state. Thus far of Mary's present physical condition.

Saunders Malcolmson, it was evident, must content himself meanwhile with the prospect of fetching Mary home some time after. And he tried to make up his

mind to that. He had arranged matters with his wife, who was to remain as her daughter's nurse, and he came to the bedside to say good-bye to Mary before setting out to return to Skellach Brae alone, when he found that yet another obstacle stood in the way.

"Weel, I 'll be back again gin an aucht days, maybe, for ye baith," said Saunders with what hopefulness of tone he could command.

"For mither an' Maggie, fader?" said Mary, looking up with a troubled and feverish look.

"Oh God help me na, Mary!—for them an' *you*," exclaimed Saunders Malcolmson in a tone of earnestness that made even his own wife start slightly.

"Na, fader, nae me."

"Hoot, Mary, dinna speak that wye," persisted Saunders, coming nearer the bedside as he spoke.

"*He* wudna leeft me though a' the wardle hed been against me," continued Mary, whose eyes were again half closed.

"We winna vex 'er eenoo, man; her an' me 'll speak aboot that aifterhin fan we 're a bittie better, may be. An' we 'll lat ye ken fan to come back for 's," said Margaret Malcolmson.

"But for a' that I canna leave him; I canna leave him noo, an' he was aye sae kin' to me an' Maggie, an' wuntin' to dee richt to a' body."

The words, in the latter part of the sentence especially, were uttered in a tone of what seemed half soliloquy. As Mary ceased speaking, Margaret Malcolmson motioned her husband to leave; and after again bidding his daughter farewell with far more outward evidence of strong emotion on his part than he had up to that point exhibited, Saunders Malcolmson reluctantly left her bedside; and, after a brief and earnest conference with his wife outside the cottage, was soon thereafter on his homeward journey to Skellach Brae, where he arrived in due time.

Now, as Saunders Malcolmson pondered these imme-

diately by-gone things in his heart, his reflections did not become more comfortable, but rather the reverse. It was not that Saunders retained the slightest shade of the old hard bitter thoughts that had moved him to do and say as he did, when Willie Fraser and Mary had so outraged what he imagined to be his heart's deepest feelings. Concerning Mary there could be no doubt his feeling—and he had unmistakably shown it—was that of strong anxiety rooting in true, even if it might be rugged and repressed, paternal affection. But as Saunders thought and thought again of him in whom Mary's life had been so closely bound up, he had much more than begun to doubt how far his own sentiments and conduct had, from the very outset, been right or justifiable. His familiar friend, Sprottie, had called after his return, to learn the facts and offer what sympathy seemed allowable in the circumstances. Sprottie, erstwhile, a man after Saunders's own heart in matters ethical and economical, had cautiously groped his way to the subject of his visit by referring to the death of Saunders's son-in-law, as "an ill accident," and then adding, with some suddenness—"Ye hinna fesh'n the goodwife wi' ye?"

"Ah, Sprottie," exclaimed Saunders, "it's a terrible bizness this! Fa cud 'a expeckit it. Nae aiven them 't wus nearest till 'im able to win till 's side fan he was deid an' gane!"

"Eh, man!" exclaimed Sprottie.

"There 's nae wardle's gear, man, that I wudna gi'en to see 'im alist again, fan aw leukit on 's stark an' seelent face yon'er. An' weel micht aw; for I didna dee richt to him an' her, man."

"Hoot, Skellie," exclaimed Sprottie, fairly surprised and even startled at his neighbour's passionate tone; "hoot, Skellie, ye mauna speak that gate; the like o' that comes o' Providence, ye ken. Fowk maun bide a hantle in this wardle."

"Bide a hantle! Ay; but fan yer nain conscience

tells ye straucht out 't ye 've been deein the deevle's wark oonbidden, an' wi' nae thanks nor paymen', it 's a terrible thing, man."

"Noo, Saun'ers, ye maun *not* speak that gate, ye 've nae occasion," protested Sprottie.

Saunders Malcolmson did not debate the point with him. Sprottie, on the other hand, needed no one to tell him that his friend was troubled after a fashion that his skill was little adequate to deal with; and having said his brief and somewhat blunt say of sympathy, he was fain to turn the conversation in the way that seemed to him most natural. Sprottie tried to strike a workable key-note about the weather an' the "girse" an' the young beasts; but he failed in drawing out any responsive chord. Even when he talked gravely of the valuable stirk that had taken the quarter ill, whose life he had saved by a prompt and vigorous use of the "fleems," and advised Saunders to follow his example by letting blood freely of his "year aul's" as a precautionary measure, Saunders, to his great surprise, seemed like a man absent in mind on such topics, and who could at best give but a dull Ay or No, being weighted in spirit by some yet graver matter. And Sprottie being in his measure uncomfortable at this aspect of things, did not much prolong his visit.

Saunders Malcolmson was troubled about Mary's extreme weakness; and he was troubled more than he could well say about the way in which she seemed to cling to, and have her heart filled with thoughts of him who was dead and gone. But he could only bear his burden in silence as he moved out and in. He could not communicate much of what he thought to his boys; they were, Saunders felt, too young and too inexperienced in relation to life's sadder side. Yet, self-contained man as he was, Saunders felt sorely the need of something like wise companionship and true sympathy, even if accompanied by words of honest rebuke. A week had passed since he returned

to Skellach Brae, and he had begun, for more reasons than one, to long much for a reply to the letter he had made his son Donald write, giving intimation of his safe arrival home, and asking very specially to be informed, at as early a date as conveniently might be, how Mary was, and when it was likely she could bear, and would consent, to be removed to Skellach Brae.

Alas, for thee, Saunders Malcolmson! Return of strength when the light of life is flickering to its last with all the force of the heaviest wrack the spirit can suffer bearing on it!

A letter at last came, but its contents were neither full nor satisfactory. It had been written by some one at Margaret Malcolmson's request; it could hardly be her dictation even; and the few bald, uncouth, and unexpressive sentences of which it consisted, while they gave the minimum of information, conveyed a sufficiently unsatisfactory, and even alarming impression. Its effect on Saunders was only to add to his sense of trouble and anxiety.

Mary Malcolmson, in truth, was now wholly confined to bed, occasionally delirious, and, for the time at least, past all power of taking sustenance to support her strength, or remedies to check the disease that held her in its deadly grasp. Her mother was a woman of too much good sense, either to shut her own eyes to the real circumstances of the case, or to desire to keep others concerned in ignorance of them. But perhaps, even to her watchful eyes, the rapid progress of the fatal disease was not apparent in its full extent.

CHAPTER X.

A LIFE JOURNEY ENDED.

A FORTNIGHT had now passed since Saunders Malcolmson had returned home, and the time that had elapsed had, as already stated, witnessed a material reduction in Mary's little remaining strength. Margaret Malcolmson, who now but seldom left her daughter's bedside by night or by day, had laid "moyen" and got the services of a rather stupid old crone as nurse to Wee Maggie. The "speanin" of the poor infant was, of course, a matter of sheer necessity; and despite the utmost vigilance that Margaret Malcolmson could use in the circumstances, the process went on at times in a less skilful and tender fashion than was desirable—a fact made all the more touching by reason of the poor young mother's keen distress at the feeble wailings of the infant her weakened arms could now no longer shield or fondle.

At the stage of time already indicated, Mary had had an unusually troubled night, and while the early part of the day had passed with more quietness, it had hardly brought more rest. Toward mid-afternoon, when the descending sun began to shine through the small four-paned window in the western gable of the cottage, and to light up the interior with a more cheerful light, Mary desired to be half raised in bed. She endeavoured to sit thus, with pillows at her back to support her; and then she wished Wee Maggie to be set by her side, the old woman being at the time absent on some errand. When matters had been so adjusted,

the poor wan bairnie, that now looked even more shrivelled and unthriving than before, responded to its mother's feeble effort to stroke its cheek by a tiny "scraigh" of satisfaction, and an attempt to scramble yet nearer her bosom; an attempt to which Mary could respond only by a fixed look of intense and yearning love.

"Mither," said Mary, breaking a short season of what appeared to be meditative silence on her part —"Mither, ye 've been kin', kin' to me."

"Hoot na, Mary; fa wud be kin' to ye gin it warna yer ain mither?"

"An' it hedna been you I wud 'a been sweir to leave Maggie noo. But ye 've been kin'er to me nor onybody kens; and ye 'll be kin' to her, tee—winna ye, mither?"

"Peer innocent, fa wudna be kin' till 'er?"

"Mither," continued Mary after another pause, during which the oppressiveness of breathing stopped her utterance—"Isna Maggie richt like *him!*"

"Eh, her blue eenies 's as like yer ain as they can be, Mary!"

"But the brooie, mither—an' jist notice fan she leuks up to ye."

"Ou ay, peer thingie; awat she 's rael like 'im," said Margaret Malcolmson. Perhaps she was convinced of what Mary so clearly saw; perhaps her words merely indicated that she considerately recognised the expediency of at least humouring the fancy of the poor mother.

"An' she 'll be a' 't 'll keep onybody in min' o' 'im ere lang. Wasna Marget grannie's name tee?"

"Ay; but she was awa' mony a year ere ye was born, Mary."

"But the ring was her's?"

"Was 't the little stone't ringie?"

"Ay," answered Mary, apparently surprised that any doubt could exist on the subject; "the ring 't *ye* sent to me."

"It was yer grannie's; and she ga'e 't to me oot amo' a' the lave for a keepsake, 'cause I was youngest."

"Oh, mither, it was—sae kin' o' you to sen' 't—to lat me ken that your love wasna less aifter a'. Oh, gin it hedna been that, my hert wud 'a maist broken, mither,—to be sae lang bainish't fae ye a'. Wud ye —lat me gi'e 't to Maggie—the ring, mither?"

"Surely, Mary; but ye're speakin' owre muckle, *my* lassie. Lat me tak' Maggie awa' noo."

"Nae yet, mither. I wunt—it deen—it maun be deen noo. Wud ye open my breist?"

"Faur is the ring, than, my dear?"

"Here, mither, faur it's been—nicht an' day—sin' Maggie's kirsenin."

Margaret Malcolmson, as directed, opened the breast of her daughter's bed-gown, and there, over her heart, on a narrow ribbon passing round her neck, she found the precious stoned ring, of which the reader has previously heard. She shortened the ribbon, and passed it over Wee Maggie's neck, carefully placing the ring in the bosom of her little dress. Mary, who was lapsing into a state of extreme exhaustion, now looked up with a satisfied smile, and said in a faint whisper—

"Mither!—lat me kiss Maggie!"

When she had gratified this last request, Margaret Malcolmson took the child gently away to put it into its cradle. She smoothed Wee Maggie's couch, laid her carefully down, and for a couple of minutes sung a quiet lullaby to the infant as she stooped over it. She then returned to the bedside. Mary seemed to be dropping quietly off to sleep: she sought to make some slight adjustment of the bed-clothes for her comfort, and as she did so her hand was arrested in the act. A change in the patient's countenance struck her, and as she watched it for a moment, two or three heavy acts of breathing followed. Nothing more! Then all was silent: and Margaret Malcolmson, with an awe-struck heart, gazing fixedly on Mary's sunken face and still form, knew that her daughter was no longer an inhabitant of this earth.

CHAPTER XI.

ANOTHER CALL OF THE BELLMAN.

The man with the Highland shaltie made another journey to Skellach Brae. And this time when Saunders Malcolmson saw him approach, he was in no doubt either as to who he was or what was his errand.

"An' my lassie 's awa' neist!" was his exclamation when the bellman drew near.

"Your lassie 's awa' to them that 's gane afore!"

"God's wull be deen!" said Saunders; and I think he spoke with a goodly measure of sincerity when he said it. Saunders Malcolmson's nature was stern and rugged, but it had at last been touched in some of its deeper springs. The man with the shaltie did not say Amen literally to the utterance of Saunders, but he meant as much probably when he exclaimed -

"Ay, an' it 's fat will be deen for evermair, man."

The man with the shaltie, as has been already said, was the bellman of the parish. A truly proper and respectable church officer and sexton he; in the outward aspect and bearing of him homely even to roughness, yet was there nothing about him suggestive of the ghoul with a bias toward interment of all and sundry as a piece of professional work, sorrowful, it might be, but at least necessary, and that served to put money in his pocket. On the contrary, the bellman was one of the most supremely contented, certainly one of the most obliging men in the parish to which he belonged. For why had he not his croft, his doddie cow, his wonderful shaltie; were not his family trials over long,

long ago ; and could not he, by jogging along in his own easy, unfettered way, do more than meet the very moderate wants of himself and "the aul' 'oman," his wife? To what better use might he turn his time and efforts, as it concerned the souls and bodies of the community, than a due and faithful discharge of the duties of that office, which in its season meets the need of all? Not the mere perfunctory burial of the dead, leaving the rank grass and uncouth weeds to grow at will over the entire space, where at each footstep there lies the silent testimony of generations to the great mystery of life and death—the nearest testimony we shall get till we have ourselves passed over to the majority. Not thus did the bellman perform his function ; but with that kind of diligent painstaking, and regard to order, which seemed to recognise the right of every inhabitant of God's acre, how humble soever, to be remembered and cared for by some one.

No, Saunders Malcolmson ; it was very natural, and a thing creditable to thee no doubt, when thine own Mary had been laid by the side of her husband in that quiet, half-highland kirkyard, and seeing all the kindly trouble the bellman had first and last taken, to pull out thy pocket-book and offer him a "paper note" in reward of his services, over and above the modest dues. It was equally naturally in the bellman to decline the gift as he did.

"Hoot, fat hae I adee wi' yer siller," said the bellman decisively, and almost sharply.

"Ou man, it 's nae within my poo'er to mak' ye up nae ither gate for fat ye 've deen."

"Ah! bless ye, goodman, siller winna buy back the breath that 's awa'—weel ken I that ; nedder will 't gie a quaet conscience to them that hisna 't. An' fat hae I deen that siller would pay me for? I 'm nae needin' ocht that it cud buy ; na, na, Gweed be thankit. I 've hed o' my nain, man, ta'en hame to the faul', an' I 've neen wi' me noo but her that 's been my marrow for

foorty year; we can nedder o' 's need lang fat we can gedder here, an' feint a plack o' 't can we cairry farrer wi' 's. An fat happier wud I be though ye sud mak' me maister o' the best mailin i' the pairis'."

"Weel, weel, ye 've deen a hantle for me 't siller cud never pay."

"The best paymen' 's to ken 't ye can be lippen't till b' them 't needs a freen's turn. Tell me gin there be ocht else, be 't muckle or little, 't I can dee."

"I 've pitten ye to fash that belangs to neen but mysel', but it wud save me mair nor a weary travel gin ye war to see him 't was their maister aboot han'in' owre the hoose fan we gyang awa'."

"It 'll be sma' fash that; to turn the key i' the door as ye lea'e 't, an' han't owre to wyte till anither comes to apen an' gae in."

"Oh, man, I 'll never forget yer kin'ness to me an' to—them that 's awa," exclaimed Saunders, grasping the bellman's hand with some fervour. "Gweed nicht; an' it 's a gryte comfort to me an' mine, at sic a time, till 'a hed the like o' you takin' aboot things.

"Gweed nicht; gin ye be satisfeet, I 'm mair nor pay't," replied the bellman.

And so they parted once more—the bellman and Saunders Malcolmson.

CHAPTER XII.

AT SKELLACH BRAE AGAIN.

With the last chapter this homely sketch should probably have taken end. In the way of characters I have little left but a stubborn old carle, of whom the reader may be supposed to have now seen the best side as well as the worst; and a puny infant of a few months, whose life or death, to all outward seeming, were as little likely to affect the history and ongoings of the world as almost anything that could happen within the range of rational observation or human experience. Nevertheless, in the possibilities of every human life, young or old, not absolutely in the power of that gross overmastering vice which almost to human sight seems to burn out the potentialities of the immortal soul, there are to be found, with little seeking, elements of perennial interest, be the station ever so lowly, and the sphere of action ever so uneventful.

Yes; one owes this much to Saunders Malcolmson even. There are afflictions that not only take away the light of our life, never to be relit here, but which limit our prospect to a single measured step between us and the great hereafter. And yet where the affliction has served its end in some good measure, we shall, if we see in the least clearly, find the power of the awful and silent I Am, soon wonderfully mellowed by the sunlight beneficence—manifested in one form or other—of the pure and great hearted Father, whom the later and better revelation has taught us to believe in as the Ruler of all events. "I will not leave you com-

fortless." The words, while uttered with a special reference, yet express a principle of wide application in the divine government; and they have by-and-by been found true in the experience of many a one who had been verily persuaded that comfort for him on this earth there was none.

Not that Saunders Malcolmson thought or reasoned precisely thus. Saunders for a while, and a long while, was simply out of tune with himself; terribly out of tune; bereaved in feeling, but, let us not omit to say it, somewhat penitent. What we wish to do before closing is to get a glimpse or two of the progress of matters with him under this state of mind—and they can only be quite cursory glimpses—and to learn somewhat of the future of his grand-daughter, the feeble and fragile Wee Maggie.

Mid-afternoon of the day after Mary's funeral saw Saunders Malcolmson far on his homeward journey to Skellach Brae. The cart was in its former rig substantially. Saunders, of his own proper motive, had arranged that, along with Mary's chest of drawers and body clothing, Willie Fraser's "kist" and its contents should be removed home; but, meanwhile, these articles were left behind, and only such things as served the purposes of the journey taken. Beside him, among the clean straw, sat his wife, Margaret Malcolmson, and in her arms, underneath a multitude of wraps, the orphaned Wee Maggie. It had been wonderfully quiet, the poor, wee fragment of humanity. For though it was a rough blustering day in early May, the watchful care of that grannie, who was now her tenderest guardian, served effectually to prevent the winds visiting her tiny face too roughly, and Wee Maggie was in a quiet way delighted with the inspiriting feeling created by the free air and light of heaven. And otherwise, poor thing, she had no great surplus of physical energy at command to produce anything in the nature of an uproar.

"Sit roun' a bittie, 'oman, an' lat 'er see the horsie noo, to be some divert till 'er," said Saunders Malcolmson, when they had jogged on for several hours, after sundry attempts of his own to attract the child's attention, and, as he believed, amuse it.

"Peer wifie; it's growin' unco tireteese. But it's a richt gweed wifockie; an' never greets neen;" and Margaret Malcolmson fondled the infant afresh.

"Weel, 'oman, it's something byous wi' quaetness; or it wud 'a been oot o' teen a'thegither ere noo;" said Saunders. "It'll be a perfeck ferly gin it dinna leern to girn some mair nor it does."

"The peer infant's fen'less, an' tir't oot as weel, eenoo, man," said Margaret Malcolmson.

"Aye, nae doot, nae doot; but it chates me gin it binna quaet o' naitur," continued Saunders gazing earnestly and thoughtfully at Wee Maggie, who was directing her demure and steady look at nothing in particular.

In this instance, perhaps, Saunders's instinct did not mislead him. At anyrate, when Skellach Brae had been safely reached, and matters had again subsided into something like their ordinary course, the domestic procedure adopted and enforced by him left no room to doubt that, in the person of Wee Maggie, a somewhat important addition had been made to the household. Maggie, moreover, had early attained a certain character with others besides her grandfather.

"Weel, 'oman, o' a' the creaturs that ever wus seen in oor pairt, that bairnie at Skellie's is the mervel to me."

"Eh, but the poor thing 'll be clean connacht."

"An', wud ye b'lieve 't? it's the aul' man 'imsel', Saun'ers yon'er, 't's maistly to blame."

"But dinna ye raelly think 't Saun'ers's jist been some weyk kin' aye sin Mary's deith, no?"

"An' ye 've jist said it noo. I never mintit at sic a

thing to nae livin', and wudna, on nae account; but that time 't Sprottie 'imsel' gaed doon i' the spring to speer for them fan *she* was awa' wi' Mary, Saun'ers spak' till 'im mair like a fey body nor the cowshus man 't he ees't to be. Awat Sprottie tyeuk byous ill wi' 't fae ane that we 've kent sae lang for a neebour. Only we thocht he hed jist been dumpitch aboot things 't hed happen't at the time. But the wye that he 's been idoleesin' the creatur o' an infant wud raelly gar a bodie think that 's jeedgment 's nae fit it ees't to be."

"Hoot, 'oman; gin ye hed seen 'im as I did, i' the vera heid o' hairst, gyaun stoitin' aboot amo' the stooks at 's leasure, wi' the littleanie in 's oxter, fan oor fowk, aul' an' young, wus at the flaucht to get in a puckle for fear o' the brucklie weather—aw cud hardly believe my nain een."

"Aw dinna won'er at it; for fa ees't to be first o' the feedles gin screik o' day fan there was the chance o' an enterin mornin', an' hin'most o' drawin' hamewith as lang 's the meen glentit owre the tap o' the hill fan gloamin hed set upo' the shearers, but Skellie."

"He 's feerious fon't o' the bairnie, an' a bodie wu lna won'er at it; but there 's a mid-se i' the sea, ye ken, an' it is *not* wisse-like to gae sic len'ths. Forbye gettin' a lassie to nurse 't, he can hardly lippen 't oot o' 's nain sicht."

"Weel, peer man, it 's an unco veesion o' a creatur; aw doot sair it winna store the kin lang, dee wi 't fat he likes."

"Eh, it winna live; it 's owre douce an' aul'-farran like, an' fan it lauchs or sicklike it has nae kin' o' craw aboot it ava. An' ye wu lna aiven hear 't gi'e a cheep o' a greet in a month's time."

The interlocutors in this dialogue were Sprottie's wife and her neighbour woman, and their discussion of Saunders Malcolmson and his personal affairs might be regarded as a not inaccurate reflex of the opinion of the neighbourhood six months after the advent of Wee Maggie at Skellach Brae.

As time went on, matters did not change much in the quiet life of Saunders Malcolmson's establishment. At Maggie's first coming, Saunders's two sons, now tolerably well grown lads, who felt themselves rather beyond bairnly ways, had fought somewhat shy of the fragile-looking little stranger, for which they were immediately visited with Saunders's emphatic censure. Maggie soon gained on them too, however, till by-and-by Saunders deemed it incumbent upon him to warn them against the risk they incurred of "spoilin'" the bairn. In Saunders's idea of the thing, he, solely and alone, could hit the just medium between over-strictness and over-indulgence in the management of the child. No matter if other people continued to think, or say, that Saunders in his own case furnished the most glaring illustration of foolish fondness for his little orphan grand-daughter. Saunders was not only totally unconscious of anything of the sort, but he held to it more firmly than he held to any other article of his creed, that he could not be in any mistake about Wee Maggie. Spoil the bairn by over-indulgence! Preposterous notion! Where in the wide universe was there aught that could mar or obscure his perfect comprehension of Maggie's just wants and feelings, or dim Maggie's simple yet unqualified and growing faith in him?

As pure matter of fact, the terms of intimate communion of spirit and feeling on which Saunders Malcolmson and Wee Maggie lived were remarkable to behold. When he took his place by the hearth, the puny "lassockie" would creep over even from her grannie's knee into his rough arms, and pull his whiskers, or quietly pick at the brass buttons on his grey waistcoat, with supreme satisfaction, while Saunders watched her movements with an expression which there was no possibility of mistaking. It was not that he said much, still less that he indulged in any kind of ecstatic puerility with a view to accommodate himself to Maggie's infantile intellect. Yet that Maggie knew

all about him somehow, and had unspeakable confidence in the old man, was a point not open to doubt. And Saunders's love for her, on which the whole relationship rested, was, I think, chastened as well as strong.

When Wee Maggie had "wun to the fit," she would toddle away as she could after Saunders Malcolmson at his outside labours for hours at a time, when the weather suited, without manifesting the slightest desire for other companionship. Her pedestrian powers were rather slight, for Maggie, despite the care bestowed on her, was still but a feeble, wan-coloured bairnie; but when she got tired of walking, she would sit contentedly down, and seek amusement in her own quaintly-demure fashion by plucking such modest wild flowers and showy grasses as happened to be within reach, finding her reward in Saunders's expressed admiration of her incipient nosegays, which he would condescend to smell and praise loudly when held up to him for inspection.

If Wee Maggie was feeble as a walker, she acquired very early, and very perfectly, the gift of speech. To Saunders Malcolmson this of itself would have been a source of unqualified satisfaction, simply as another proof of Maggie's super-eminent merits. To the sage women in the neighbourhood it was the last and crowning proof that poor Wee Maggie was destined to fill a very early grave. As invariably happens in the case of such vaticinations, these predictions had become perfectly well known to those who were most likely to be keenly touched by their sombre shading. Margaret Malcolmson knew all about them: they had indeed been confidentially communicated to her by their authors under the guise of fulfilling a stern duty—in the most friendly way, of course, on their part—and Margaret had not been altogether unimpressed thereby. Every faint suggestion of the sort had, however, been met by an indignant and even angry protest from Saunders Malcolmson himself:—

"Aw won'er to hear ye, 'oman; fat gars ye gi'e heed to sic aul' wives' stoit. Tell *me* that Maggie 's owre wise for 'er time! It 's seerly aneuch that oor gran'-mithers believ't i' the can o' the fairies. The littl ane 's life 'll be ta'en care o' b' a wiser Han' nor oors."

It was Saunders Malcolmson's wont to "stick to his ain text," and in this case he was every way disposed to do so. Nevertheless, as he looked upon the undoubtedly weakly physique of the placid and affectionate little woman who had come to be so much to him, it might be that Saunders at times felt a certain measure of disquiet, bred of such thoughts as have been indicated. And, as time went on, Maggie failed to improve in point of robustness; or to acquire that love of physical movement and noise that distinguishes your healthy bairn in its normal and thriving condition.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE OMENS THICKEN.

On a certain Sunday in early summer, when Saunders Malcolmson had chosen to stay at home from church and "keep the toon," with Maggie as his companion, the two went a-field together for a short distance. Saunders, who had done his shaving on the previous evening, had assumed a sort of easy *dishabille*, with the collar of his clean striped shirt loose, his red Kilmarnock night-cap on his head, and his stocking legs doubling downward over his unlaced shoes. Maggie had been duly set out in her best check pinafore, and such other small changes of attire as betokened the Sunday outfit. They had daundered together for a little space, when Saunders sat down on the sunny side of a piece of mixed plantation that encircled the grass field, in which they were, on its eastern side. Maggie, whose years now numbered two and a half, and who maintained the better part of the confidential conversation that was going on, had taken to gathering gowans, and sprigs of wild heart's-ease, when suddenly her quiet prattle ceased. Just then, a "cushat" in the plantation, which they had faintly heard before, had renewed his plaintive coo-coo-*roo*, with what seemed redoubled earnestness. Perhaps the cushat, in his shady tree, was unconscious of the comparative nearness of human creatures, otherwise his timid instincts would have led to the cessation of his monotonous, yet, pensively pleasing, solo. In place of that, a yet closer approach to his retreat, and the stillness of everything around, made his half-pathetic notes fall with increased emphasis on the ear. On looking

round after a little time, Saunders Malcolmson found Maggie motionless, and listening to the cushat's song in rapt attention. She listened for several minutes, and when the cushat had, for the second or third time, made a partial break only to begin again, she rose from her temporary resting-place amongst the grass, dropped her flowers, and toddling up to Saunders, gazed into his face with the utmost seriousness, as she said,

"Daddy-da; that doo 's greetin' 'cause his wife bids him sing!"

Saunders made no reply, except to stroke Maggie's head, and smile at what seemed to him a quaint conceit, to which only such a supremely gifted spirit as Wee Maggie's could have given birth. Then she listened with renewed earnestness as the cushat went on with his croon; crept a little closer to Saunders's breast, glanced up once or twice in his face, and then, with a half-frightened look, said—

"Bid him stop, daddy-da!"

"Hoot, Maggie," exclaimed Saunders, "the cushie-doo winna touch ye."

Maggie strove to be composed as Saunders fondly clasped her in his arms; but it was no use. She only clung to him more closely as she listened again, and then, with trembling lip and appealing look, she said—

"Oh, my peer, peer mammy! she 's deid an' awa', an' its needin' me noo, daddy-da;" and poor Maggie, as she buried her face in her grandfather's bosom, burst into a wilder fit of weeping than Saunders had ever heard her do.

"Oh, great God, spare me my lassie! Tak' aught, or a'thing else, but—my lassie!" exclaimed Saunders Malcolmson, half mentally, half articulately, and almost or altogether involuntarily, as he clasped the sobbing Wee Maggie yet more closely to his breast.

Was the superstitious notion operating on Saunders Malcolmson even? Or *was* it superstition? Who shall say?

CHAPTER XIV.

WEE MAGGIE DEVELOPING.

To speak out to thee now frankly, and at once, good reader, is something very like making a virtue of necessity. It was not the fate of Mary Malcolmson's Wee Maggie to fulfil the destiny shaped for her by the female augurs. In place of dying off in early bairnhood, Maggie continued to live and grow, all in her own quiet and sober fashion. It might be that she was pretty much the reverse of robust, and that in her whole bearing there was a kind of premature sedateness that formed a contrast to what is usual in everyday childhood, brimming over with animal spirits; and delighting, above all things, in mere physical activity. And it might be that though Maggie seldom if ever complained of actual illness (it was not her habit to complain much of anything), there was enough peculiarity in her childhood, physically as well as mentally, to make those most nearly interested in her not unfrequently feel—

> Yet there is something that doth force my fear.

Under this ever-recurring thought, a thought which he breathed not to any human being, Saunders Malcolmson indeed lived for years. It had at last got a lodgment in his mind, and there it would stay, or come and go as it chose, and not according to his will or desire.

But why, oh, Saunders, should it thus be? Was not the whole life and being of thy little grand-daughter a perfectly harmonious outcome of the later history of

thy own Mary, her mother, whose last legacy to thee and thine the child was? I have no intention of attempting to discuss psychological questions in their hereditary relations or otherwise; but it seems to me that, under all the circumstances surrounding her birth, there would, to say the very least of it, have been less of congruity in finding Maggie a creature full of rude health and boisterous vivacity, than in finding her to be what she really was; and Maggie, let it be said, is no mere fancy picture. In relation to Saunders Malcolmson personally, I am firmly persuaded it was better ordered the one way than the other; inasmuch as the feeling of solicitude was kept sufficiently in exercise—not once, or for a brief space, but often, and over a series of years—to constitute a discipline fitted to deepen his sympathies, and tone down the native hardness of his nature, which a previous habit of mind had done much to intensify. And so it was that men of the stamp of his old neighbour Sprottie found evidence to satisfy them that Saunders Malcolmson had "never cour't" the death of his daughter; that the sad events of that time had really made him a little weak, poor man.

In the childhood and girlhood of Wee Maggie, one feature of character was to be specially noted, and Saunders Malcolmson did not fail to note it.

"Ye winna believe me, 'oman, but oor nain Maggie hisna 'er marrow i' the pairis' for a biddable, aiventemper't lassie, lat aleen ither things."

In uttering these words, Saunders, of course, addressed his wife.

"Ou, it 's nae ill to get creaturs to rin the road that they wunt to gyang; it 's easy ca'in the dyeucks to the mill-dam, ye ken!" said Margaret Malcolmson, in a jocular tone.

"Hoot, 'oman, ye ken the lassie as weel 's I dee; an' ye ken that I 'm speakin' the trowth."

"Deed, man, I think she 's gotten the gate o' you

unco weel," said Margaret Malcolmson, still speaking half jocularly.

"The gate o' me ! an' fat syne ? "

"Ou, ye ees't to be gey gweed at garrin' the ba' row 's yer nain fit ca'd it ; but heely till we see ye conter Maggie ! "

"Ay, but ye ken perfeekly weel noo that Maggie never refees't to dee a single thing that she was bidden, edder to you or me."

"Aweel, that's true anouch, peer thing," said Margaret Malcolmson.

"An' she 's nae like some creaturs that 'll dee fat they 're taul', an' sulk aboot it a' the time syne. Maggie never leuks as gin the reend be twa wyes i' the maitter."

"Ou na," again retorted Margaret Malcolmson, "an' it 's a' the easier to dee fan Maggie's wye 's aye the richt ane ! "

Saunders accepted this equivocal reply in the sense that translated it into a confirmation of his own view.

It was even very much as the worthy couple had put it from their respective points of view. I shall seem, perhaps, to make a very incredible statement, yet it is a statement literally true, to say that when Wee Maggie had reached the discreet and responsible age of fifteen, she had never once received direct punishment or even serious reproof for disobedience, or, indeed, for any other fault. That she was a greatly "indulged" bairn in one sense there could be no manner of doubt, for it was not known that her grandfather or even her grandmother had ever denied her anything she desired to have. And as for the two young men, to whom Maggie, from being an attractive plaything, had gradually and insensibly grown into the rank of a companion, in no way distinguishable from a younger sister, had it not been an ever-recurring "burden" with Saunders Malcolmson to warn the lads against "spoilin' " Maggie ! But Wee Maggie's was one of those exceptional natures that literally won't spoil.

Not that the lassie was a perfectly faultless being; and, still less that she was one of the class of juvenile prudes whose abnormally developed sense of propriety enables them to discourse in the conventionalisms of mature life with a precocity that is absolutely bewildering. Maggie was simply a placid little maiden whose uniform sedateness struck even the casual observer irresistibly. Better known, Maggie had a definite mind of her own; could perhaps be even a little wilful at a time; but was found withal to be distinguished by a prevailing tone of cheerfulness: quite subdued cheerfulness, as a rule, but which now and then broke out in very hearty, though not very boisterous mirth. And over and above all, Maggie's nature was strongly affectionate. It was this that enabled her, with an instinctive tact and discrimination that never failed, to fit herself into the nature and needs of every separate member of the Skellach Brae household, giving her an unconscious power and influence with each, which it would have been difficult fully to estimate, because it was never strained to its limit.

. . . . . .

Saunders Malcolmson was getting an old man; a hale man for his years, but his years were now nearly seventy; and while he did not contemplate laying him down to die quite yet, his thoughts were more toward the winding up of such of his worldly affairs as could be put in any completed shape. He had a long while ago made his will, wherein his goods, gear, and effects were equitably apportioned amongst his two sons and Wee Maggie, reserving the rights in ample measure of his wife should she survive him. And in these later years of his history, sundry other matters occupied a share of his attention, which in the years gone past would have been regarded with indifference, impatiently turned aside from at once, or met with a burst of unmistakable anger. His behaviour in this respect rather tended with some to keep up the impression

of his weakened judgment, but of this Saunders made no account, if, indeed, the thought ever crossed his mind.

Now it so happened that Saunders Malcolmson had been exercised in mind about two things. The first was the possibility, probability, or propriety of his elder son, Donald, who was to be farmer of Skellach Brae, getting married, and what it lay to him to do in that case. It was in the natural order of things that the young man's desires and intentions should be that way. And, Saunders, heedful of bitter experience in the past, had reached the conclusion that it was a parental duty to know all that betimes, and knowing it, to adopt the course, at any sacrifice to himself, that should avert the risk of such disaster as might thereafter be rued. But how to attain his end? The question was not one to be successfully handled by himself unaided; and Saunders naturally thought of his wife. He was not, however, greatly advanced in the business by his application in that quarter—

"Hoot, man, fat need ye fash yersel' aboot that. I'se warran' Donal' 'll tell 's in gweed time. Foo wud *ye* a' ta'en wi' 't gin onybody hed speer't that at you fan ye was like 'im?"

Saunders failed to see it as his wife did, but evidently little more could be made of Margaret Malcolmson directly, and when he still pressed the question, she said:—

"Weel, weel, man, gin ye will be at the boddom o' 't ye'll jist need-a gae to Maggie; she'll shortly manage to pit Donal' an' you tee throu yer facin's, nae doot."

"I 'll speer at 'er ony wye," said Saunders.

He "speer't" accordingly; and Maggie laughed pawkily in old Saunders's face, but said nothing.

"But aw wunt ye to tell me, Maggie."

"I maybe cudna."

"Fa ither cud dee 't than?"

"Donal' 'imsel', gin he like't."

"Weel, I'm seer he'll tell *you* seener nor onybody."

"But aw dinna think that Donal' has—a lass," said Maggie hesitatingly; "an' he wudna be seekin' to mairry, ye ken."

But Saunders insisted on reaching certainty; and Maggie, with little more ado, undertook the duty of asking Donald all about it. This duty the sly little damsel had perhaps the less delicacy in undertaking from the fact that "Uncle Donal'" had up to that stage, as she very well knew, rather prided himself on stiffly maintaining the attitude of a non-marrying man. Maggie's unceremonious way of getting at her object was to ask him straight out, with an air of assumed gravity—

"Fan are ye gyaun to be marriet, uncle?"

"Eh! ye little monkey," said Donald, catching Maggie by the ear, "fat gars ye bather fowk? I'll get you marriet to some crusty aul' Turkis, wi' a face like a grey cuddy's, that'll keep ye in order the richt gate.—Ye've a lad yersel', eh?" Truth to tell, Maggie blushed at this interrogatory somewhat more decidedly perhaps than her interrogator had expected; and the good-natured Donald, with a firm asseveration that *he* knew quite well who her sweetheart was, ceased his banter forthwith.

Maggie on her part was able to report in good faith to Saunders that, so far from any definite intention of getting married, his son Donald really could not, so far as she knew, boast of owning a sweetheart. Such was the opinion of her uncle Francie, as well as her own. Maggie presumably did not regard her "remit" on the subject as including the affairs of uncle Francie himself, concerning whom there was ground to believe she could have revealed a different state of matters. But if uncle Francie—who had years ago left the paternal roof at Skellach Brae to learn the useful craft of a blacksmith, and was now a "tradesman" on his own account—had made Maggie his confidant, it would have been out of the question to divulge his secret.

The other subject which had revolved itself in Saunders Malcolmson's mind now and again, for several years, was of a totally different kind. Long ago, Saunders had thought of a "head stone" to mark the far-off grave of his deceased daughter and her husband. In course of time the stone had been actually got, and he took counsel with the dominie concerning the inscription. The dominie gave it to be understood that he could on fit occasion furnish a very elegant and suitable epitaph in Latin. He repeated several examples with a paraphrastical translation for Saunders's enlightenment; and even hinted that the classic tongue named was the fittest vehicle of any for the expression of pious grief and loving remembrances. Saunders failing in due appreciation of this harmless display of learning—(for his friend had no serious intention of proposing for his approval what he could not read)—bluntly declared he could have nothing to do with the dominie's "Laitin"; and he referred him to the Bible as the proper place from whence to select a fitting sentiment; when, having the names and dates, he could "pit it thegither" correctly, as desired. Of course, the dominie at once fixed on the beautiful lines in King David's elegy on the death of Saul and Jonathan—"They were lovely and pleasant in their lives, and in their death they were not divided." Rather to the dominie's disgust, as well as his surprise, Saunders, after due consideration, rejected even this as failing in appropriateness, and he gave up the task with a slightly crusty remark concerning Saunders's obstinacy.

"I may be obstinate, man, but it gaes nearer the quick wi' me nor ye wud think. It 's fae nae disrespeck to you," said Saunders, in a tone of much earnestness, "but *I* daurna pit that"; and the mollified dominie handed him a new draft in outline, adding,

"Weel, that 's the settin' o' 't, ye 'll jist need to choose a text yersel', and copy in'o the blank."

At this stage the dominie's elder son, then a high-

school student, and a not infrequent visitor at Skellach Brae, came in to lend his assistance, freely offering such hints and suggestions as occurred to him, in accordance with what he saw to be the mood of Saunders Malcolmson's mind.

And in this wise, and after much pondering on Saunders Malcolmson's part, the headstone had ultimately been finished, sent to its destination in charge of his two sons, and duly set up under supervision of the old bellman, the erstwhile owner of the small hairy shaltie.

CHAPTER XV.

THE CONCLUSION OF THE WHOLE MATTER.

SEVENTEEN long years had passed since the death of Willie Fraser and Mary Malcolmson, when Saunders Malcolmson, this time as one of a family group, again stood by their grave. At Saunders's request, Donald had yoked the cart, and driven him, his wife, and Wee Maggie thither, over all that long road from Skellach Brae. There they stood; Donald in the full strength of early manhood, with Maggie, a comely girl of eighteen, but whose staid and thoughtful look, when at rest, might have well enabled her to pass for twenty; and, close by her, Margaret and Saunders Malcolmson, now both considerably "failed" through the course of years. By Maggie's side, too, was our old student friend, whose hand had some years ago been employed on the epitaph. He was presently the substitute schoolmaster of a neighbouring parish, having hitherto acquired no recognised position of his own; and by some mysterious means, which it did not occur to Saunders to inquire into, he had become aware of the visit about to be made, and employed part of a school holiday to travel a half-dozen miles to meet his old friends. And near them stood a yet older man, bending over his stick—the bellman, now a lonely widower. They stood and read thus:

Sacred to the Memory
OF
WILLIAM FRASER,
ACCIDENTALLY KILLED, APRIL 8, 1853,
AGED 29,
AND HIS WIFE,
MARY MALCOLMSON,
WHO DIED, APRIL 27TH, 1853,
AGED 23.

And behold the tears of such as were oppressed, and they had no comforter.

Wherefore I praised the dead which are already dead, more than the living which are yet alive.—Eccl. chap. iv.

"An' this is their lassockie, man!" said the bellman after a pause; "a grown 'oman."

"Ay, she 's comin' up; an' we 've baith come to be little bu'kit sin' we last met here," said Saunders Malcolmson.

"Gweed safe ye, my lassie; ye get nae dower o' shame fae them that wus yer pawrents," continued the bent old bellman looking kindly at Maggie. "It wus little I ken't o' them, an' less I ken o' ony o' you; but simple, honest, hamel fowk, wi' little o' this wardle's gear to ca' their ain, an' maybe a fell share o' fat we come a' throu', mair or less, o' the shady side o' the wa' —they 're nae ill to win alike wi'. To them the wardle wears nae fause face; an' they canna mint to gae here or there afore ithers in playactors' claise. We see them ance, an' we 've seen them aye, or the faut 'll maist lickly be oor nain. 'Deed ay; ye winna tak' it ill fae an aul' man, but the tae half o' the tribbles an' disagreements that mak' oor life snell an' bitter faur it mith be sweet an' pleasant, comes fae oor ain laithfu conceit o' oorsel's, an' it may be oor hard an' hasty joodgments upon ithers—better nor oorsel's, it weel may be. An' is this anither oye o' yours?" continued the bellman, whose eye next rested on Maggie's immediate companion.

"Ou na, man," replied Saunders; "he 's nae freen'; a neebour lad 't we 've kent sin' he was a bairn, an' weel respeckit him an' his. It 's vera kin' o' 'im to min' on 's aul' acquantance, but he 's nae freen', man."

"Weel, weel," quoth the bellman, "they 're sometimes fitter freen's 't 's nae drap's bleed nor them 't 's sibbest till 's. Seil upo' them," he added, as the young people, for reasons known to them, turned away to look at the quaint and rustic memorials of the departed that were placed all about them—Donald had gone to find his horse for the return journey—"Seil upo' them, they 're a winsome pair. Aboot fat they may hae, or houp to hae, o' this wardle's gear I ken naething; an'

as little wud I care to ken. But, oh, man, it 's a muckle maitter to be leal an' true, first an' foremost, an' for aye, to fat 's set deepest i' the single ae-faul hert by Him that made it."

Saunders Malcolmson looked first at his wife, and then he gazed after the two young people in a half-bewildered kind of way. "It may be; it may be, man. An' nae fitter place for me to mak' amen's to them for my oppression in the time byegane;" and Saunders, who spoke slowly and abstractedly, paused.

"But ye mauna heed me," continued the old bellman, resuming, "ye mauna heed me, sirs. I 'm but a strainger in a mennor to you an' yours. I 'll awa' an' tak' a stap doon the loan; an' fan yer throu' jist tak' ye tee the yettie ahin ye. We dinna like orra stragglers, wi' four feet or twa, comin' aboot 's oonkent an' unearin'. Good-day, good-day!"

The old bellman went his way as he had said. And those whom he addressed, in due season, went theirs; not, however, till Saunders Malcolmson had made it perfectly plain to all concerned that, greatly as his affections were bound up in Maggie, there was a yet tenderer tie which Maggie might rightly form, and with the formation of which no sordid thought must interfere, under pain of a vastly greater crime than sacrilege. It is a safe enough conclusion to say that his words were accepted by Maggie and her immediate companion, at anyrate, as the words of ripened wisdom.

COUPER SANDY.

HIS UNDERGRADUATE CAREER.

It was in his schoolboy time that my acquaintance with Sandy Mutch began. We two sat, with several others, on the same form, and had our sympathies stirred in common against what we deemed the harsh and unfeeling spirit that animated the pedagogue to whose rule we were subjected. Not that Sandy and his immediate companions were in all things precisely alike as it concerned their tastes and capacities, or that their dread of an application of the tawse sprung always from similar causes. The dominie himself would make a distinction. Against certain of us his complaint mainly was that of indulgence in too frequent fits of trifling (alas! poor man, he never fully found out the extent to which that habit was carried), and consequent failure to do the work one might easily have done. So said the dominie, and doubtless with perfect truth. His unvarying allegation against Sandy was that he was simply an incorrigible dunce, who neither could nor would learn his tasks—a condition of things that was to the dominie a real affliction; for somewhat slovenly and unscientific as his methods were, it grieved him to train up a lad who could not even make a decent show of concealing his ignorance.

And how far soever the dominie's opinion regarding the one set of his pupils may have been correct, or the opposite, there really seemed to be substantial grounds

for believing that his conclusions concerning Sandy Mutch's capacity as a pupil were essentially sound. Sandy had no clerkly tastes or leanings whatever. As a reader he was fearfully deficient, and his efforts at spelling reduced the dominie to despair. In arithmetic it was just a case of absolute propulsion through some of the simpler rules; but even at his most mature stage he got hopelessly aground at the "Rule of Three," and there lay high and dry, without once obtaining a glimmering of what it was all about. Writing he did moderately well, as far as fashioning the mere letters went, but there his old habit came in again. He could not but mis-spell, even with the copy line before him; when it was absent, the grotesque violence done to the recognised orthography was bewildering to look at, and caused the "Maister" frequent paroxysms of anger and disgust.

Curiously enough, Sandy Mutch had a sort of faculty in the way of technical memory. And thus in answering questions in the Catechism, if too strict inquisition were not made after a distinct and literal rendering, he would occasionally rattle of a sort of vague paraphrase that in its rough contour and likeness to the sound of the characteristic words bore a strong general resemblance to the real answer. Any analysis that demanded "meanings" of course threw him completely out, to say nothing of the "proofs," which the dominie prided himself on having been the first in our Presbytery to compel his scholars to tackle, and which Sandy Mutch found utterly beyond his powers.

Well, there could be no doubt of it; Sandy Mutch, on the scholastic side of him, was certainly a dunce. Outside the school he seemed to possess no very striking characteristics. His temperament would, I imagine, have been deemed phlegmatic. A lumbering, uncouth sort of lad; willing enough to take a share, more or less, in any rough or mischievous enterprise going on, but without sufficient energy or recklessness to be a

leader. His tendencies were, on the whole, toward those occupations that could be carried on without much physical effort; and, in particular, he had a decided taste for bargain-making, as it went on among a certain section of his schoolfellows. In this connection Sandy was the subject of some envious talk occasionally. It was known that, by a system of judicious barter, he had become the possessor of almost the finest set of "bools" going amongst his contemporaries; and then, not to speak of other and minor transactions, while he had come to school with merely a "Life-knife"—cost fourpence-halfpenny, as all the world knew—supplied to him by paternal outlay, the winter "raith" was not half over when there was in his possession, in exchange for the Life-knife and sundry other very inconsiderable articles, a real "Jockteleg gullie," erstwhile owned by one of the bigger loons; and it was a patent fact that a gullie like it could not have been bought under eighteenpence.

Robbie Mutch, the village souter, was a talkative, intelligent, outspoken little man; as village souters often are; not devoid of intellectual keenness, and much given to political and theological discussion when he found suitable companionship. His wife was a large flabby woman, the reverse rather of intelligent—only she had a power of incessant talk of a gossiping, credulous, and even superstitious sort. And in virtue of her mere physical bulk, and this power of uttering herself with a kind of irrepressible clangour, she dominated the souter in a much greater degree than could have been expected on any grounds of reason. The souter's family took mainly after their mother, not after the souter himself; and in the case of Sandy, their only son, this was quite marked. He had his mother's physique very distinctly, and also his mother's aptitude for hearsay. Beyond that, his capacity, in the direction of any of the arts by which man's life is sustained, and still more, as indicated, of literary acquirement,

had not hitherto shown itself to any good purpose whatever.

The souter was disappointed. He had early concluded that Sandy's lack of manual dexterity, not to speak of his lack of interest in the craft, unfitted him for successful application to the awl and lapstone. And though he would have willingly stretched a considerable point to give him as ample a share of schooling as he possibly could, and so push him forward into some of the learned professions, he saw that that too was utterly hopeless. "Our Sawney winna brak' the clergy ony wye," was the somewhat bitter remark addressed by Robbie Mutch to his wife, when the point occasionally came up.

But the time had come when Sandy must do something for himself in the way of earning a livelihood.

"Aw'm seer, man, ye mith hae patience wi' the laddie; he's but a bairn yet," argued Mrs. Mutch when the souter had raised the question.

"Patience, 'oman! Fat for? Fat gweed 's he deein'?—a nickum that thinks naething o' truein' the skweel ilka ither day, an' gyaun awa' takin' minnons i' the burn wi' an aul' creel, or colleaugin' wi' idle company, instead o' leernin's lessons?"

"Hoot, that dominie has nae boun's wi' 'im! Fat for wud he gar creaturs gae on wi' nae deval till they war blin' and dottl't w' leernin'? Sawney badena awa' fae the skweel a' last ouk, 'cep on Tyesday an' Saiturday; an' aw'm seer, man, he wud hae nae gryte miss for a' the time."

"He's nae the best judge o' that; and he kent weel aneuch 't he ocht till 'a been at the skweel, fan the maister taul''im that he hedna ae single word o''s lessons."

"An' him lickin' the creatur till 's very fingers wus neerhan' peel't! Fatna a laddie cud get lessons an' 's gardies stounin' wi' aiven doon ill-eesage like that? It 's aneuch to gi'e 'im a mischief, I'm seer.

"Buff an' nonsense, 'oman; gin the maister wud lay

on the tag twice as weel, it wud be fat he 's sair needin'," said Robbie Mutch, somewhat savagely.

"Keep me, man!" exclaimed Mrs. Mutch with a semi-hysterical accent and gesture. "an' that 's the wye that ye gae on! Weel, weel, aw mith speak to yun about onything o' the kin'! Aw 'm seer it 's eneuch to fleg lessons oot o' a creatur's heid, to hear 's vera nain fader speakin' that gate."

"They mith get lessons an' gae to the skweel tee that can mak' oot to herry craws' nests, an' traik aboot for oors f' the feedles dein' mischief," said Robbie, in a milder key, as became the exigency that had emerged.

"Wasna ye never a laddie yersel', man, that ye wud hae the vera best o' the littlense, tetherin' 'im till a tare dask the lee lang day, an' keepin' 'im as eident at a stent 's gin he war a man o' forty?" asked Mrs. Mutch, pathetically.

"Aw 'm seer that bean kisna been three days rinnin' at the skweel sin' the gweel weather cam' in," replied Robbie, parrying the personal appeal.

"An' foo cud ye expeck that creatures wud like to be chaumer't up the reem to even, gweed day an' ill, man, 's gin they war as mony bedalls nae able to leuk owre a door?"

It was impossible for the senior to make much of the argument, especially as his wife was again quite composed, and prepared to go on as long as he might find convenient and agreeable. But the senior had made up his mind that Sandy must be set to some useful work. And taking the youth by himself he submitted his proposal to him, which was that, summer being now at hand, Sandy should allow himself to be engaged as herd boy to some of the neighbouring farmers. Now, although Sandy very heartily disliked the business of school-tasking, and had been tempted to desert the shrine of learning too frequently of late, on very doubtful pretences, in favour of employments that seemed more congenial to him, he was not a positively stubborn

or disobedient youth; and as the proposed scheme of becoming a herd seemed to offer certain attractions, beyond that of freeing him of the growingly distasteful restraint of the school, he readily enough fell in with it. At an early opportunity thereafter he was engaged to herd the cattle of the farmer of Bowbutts accordingly.

CHAPTER II.

THE HERD LOON.

The herd loon, *sui generis*, has become extinct; and improved farming is responsible for it. With high cultivation and the reclamation of waste lands, the practice of enclosing grew. The style of the cattle, too, was changed. They began to speak of the "Teeswater"—which by-and-by they called the shorthorn—and other pure breeds; and those dainty animals were supposed to thrive better when kept in carefully fenced fields than roaming at large under charge of the herd loon, and restrained from straying into corn and turnip sections, and the like forbidden places, through dread of his club.

In my early time it was different. Fenced fields were the exception; and the mixed multitude of native bred cattle on each farm—at any rate, the cows and young cattle—were turned out day by day in a straggling band to graze, now on the "intons rigs" during the early harvest hours, and, later in the day, on the "out lordes," where arable and waste land alternated in picturesque variety. The office of the herd, if duly performed, was by no means a sinecure. Over each separate animal, individually, great and small, the herd must exercise a certain moral influence, like to its sale and its cost: to whom it was otherwise, and that came to pass with alike disregard of the herd calls to "Keep back!" and to "Come in here!" and could be called to order only by a vigorous use of the club, prepared with all the force of the herd loon's right

arm against their ribs; or, still worse, a fusillade of stones pitched at them, to the danger of their limb bones, the beasts got demoralised and learnt to "range" as opportunity offered, in a fashion destructive both to the herd's comfort and their own well-doing as profitable stock for the herd's master.

The herd's club merits a passing word of notice. It was in the fashion of a policeman's baton, but bigger: a round stick roughly cut into shape, with a slight indication of a handle at one end. And to make the club serve its purpose completely there was cut out near the handle a mystic figure, something like an ill-fashioned monogram, known as a "meltie bow," which, it was understood, saved the club from inflicting harm on the cattle if it chanced to strike them below the belt, as it were; also a rude figure of the herd himself, and in front of him certain symbols, thus :—

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The inscription on the club represented "Jockie an' 's owsen," and the full interpretation was this :—

> Twa afore ane, an' three afore five;
> First twa, an' syne twa, an' four comes belyve;
> Noo ane, an' than ane, an' three at a cast;
> Double ane, an' twice twa, an' Jockie at the last.

Such was the herd's emblem of office. By whom the symbols and legend which it bore were devised, is unknown to me.

It must be owned that as a herd loon, Sandy Mutch turned out but poorly. True it was that the open air freedom of the herd's life, as compared with the close confinement of the schoolroom, had its own charm—if one could only have had combined with that perfect and entire freedom of action according to the dictates of one's own tastes and impulses. But even at herding that might not be. Nay, the very nature of herding

implied the virtual surrender of the reasoning individual desire of the herd to the general instinctive preferences of the herded in all things right and lawful. An abnegation of one's self in their interest had to be made; and in honest performance of duty the virtues of unwearying patience, vigilant care, and a sympathetic apprehension of the bovine nature and needs had to be day by day exercised.

In the two first of these virtues, at anyrate, Sandy Mutch was conspicuously deficient. For the quiet and sober continuousness of his new occupation, in truth, neither his training nor natural habits had well fitted him; and thus his herding was marked by "fits and starts" of attention at one time, and of utter inattention and idleness at another, which accordingly put his master, the farmer of Bowbutts, in great wrath.

"Aw say, that loon wud provoke a vera saunt, a' 't a bodie can say till 'im. Fat does he mean girdin' the beasts into the barest neuk o' the faul'ies that wye!" and Bowbutts, putting his right hand up to his jaw, shouted a powerful shout to "Wyn them doon the rigs, min, b' the side o' the corn!"

The herd and his cattle were half-a-mile off; but Bowbutt's lungs were of stentorian power, and it was evident the sound they had supplied his vocal organs with motive power to emit was distinctly heard, for the herd, who had been stretched at full length on the pasture, consulting his own ease and comfort, was seen at once to move in the direction of doing what he was bid.

"He's a weary ill herd that widdifu," continued Bowbutts. "Aw 'm seer he mith 'a kent to lat them faur they wud get a gweed bite the day, to hae the creaturs weel fil't that I 'm takin' to the market."

"'Deed, man," said Bowbutts's wife—it was to her he addressed himself—"Sawney's owre easy min'et to pit 'imsel' muckle about, oonless he be weel tell't aboot it. But he has gweed can amo' beasts fan he likes, f'r a' 'at.

"He's a sweir howffin; that's fat he is," replied Bowbutts. "Little to me wud pit 'im fae the toon."

"An' fat better wud ye be o' that, man? Ye canna dee wantin' a herd," said the goodwife.

"I've a gweed min' to sen' word till's fader, an' lat 'im ken fat aw think o' 'im; eeseless nickum!"

"Gae ye awa' an' rank yersel' than; ye'll get yer shavin' leems o' the skelfie ahin the saut backit, an' yer sark o' the heid o' the drawers; an' I'll get the beasts worn in aboot in a filie."

Bowbutts did as he was bid; and the goodwife took the trouble to put herself in communication with the herd, to whom she forthwith imparted various judicious counsels in view of the duty before him that day; that, namely, of accompanying his master to market with certain cattle picked from the herd for sale, and which it behoved him accordingly to have well filled of food before commencing the journey.

In the prospect of getting off to the fair an hour or two thence, with Bowbutts riding on his pony, and himself driving four rough "stirks" in front of him, which had just been pressed on his attention, Sandy Mutch felt a distinct elation of spirits; for he had much desired to vary his existence by some such experience. And when the other cattle had been housed, and they were fully started on their three-mile journey, he addressed himself to his task with a zealous earnestness that contrasted strongly with the inert and perfunctory style of his herding. The stirks, unaccustomed to be so driven, got wondrously excited. They scampered hither and thither, and leapt over the lower fences right and left, seeking the companionship of other cattle that they had sighted as they went along. But Sandy followed the chase with a will and to purpose, for while he ran vigorously, his tactical skill in out manœuvring the errant stirks when they once and again attempted to double and force their way homeward, astonished, and nearly excited the articulate ad-

miration of even Bowbutts himself. And it was the same all through the hubbub of men and beasts during their stay in the fair. Sandy skilfully generalled his lot, kept them in the proper selling attitude, "wi' their heids to the brae, laddie," as Bowbutts had hinted to him, and even put in a fit word with would-be purchasers, when occasion demanded, during his master's temporary absence or engrossment in some incidental haggle. In short he gave unquestionable evidence of being in his element throughout; not excepting the interesting passage at the end, when Bowbutts having sold the last of the stirks, and got the lot clear off his hands, allowed Sandy to accompany him into the crowded canvas tent and partake slightly, while he discussed a final bottle of ale and a dram with a few of his cronies before setting out for home.

But as Bowbutts could not and did not go to the market every day, and as tending the cattle at home was not a duty to be well performed by merely intermittent effort, Sandy Mutch's character as herd, notwithstanding his undoubted success on the market day, was not in the least permanently bettered. Only this was noticeable, that Sandy had, with wondrous facility, taken a very broad and firm grip of what might be called the general principle of dealing in cattle. To his neighbour herd loons, with whom a good deal too much of his time was frequently spent, he expatiated at any length on the great sums of money that might be turned over in that way; and even uttered with confidence his opinion on the quality, weight, and other distinguishing particulars of given specimens of the bovine race that had come under his notice.

Meanwhile, Sandy Mutch, as has been said, was earning the title of a bad herd; and it was little comfort to the souter, as time went on, to find not only that Bowbutts declined a continuation of his services next season, but that the master to whom he had actually been engaged, before the summer was over

mulcted him of good part of his fee in consideration of damage inflicted on a neighbour's corn crop through certain gross acts of carelessness on Sandy's part.

"That loon!" exclaimed the souter, "he 'll cairry a meal pyock yet, ere a' be deen, or ca' the kwintra sellin' besoms. He 'll never mak 's breid at nae honest han'iwark;" and it really seemed but too likely.

When Sandy Mutch had out-grown the herding stage, his promise of future usefulness did not seem greatly to improve. His father had long ago signified his belief that Sandy was dull in the head; and when his mother, whose belief in the lad was yet unshaken, suggested the expediency of his learning, if not the shoemaker trade, then some other skilled craft, the souter declared, with still stronger emphasis than before, that Sawney had "nae han's," and it was no use people "herryin' themsel's an' throwin' awa' gweed siller upon 'im." The only path, therefore, that seemed open to Sandy, as the souter viewed it, was that of an "orra man" about the farm; and in point of fact such was the capacity, varied by an occasional bout as an inferior and intermittently employed day labourer, in which he spent the next few years of his life.

CHAPTER III.

THE COUPER—PRELIMINARY ESSAYS.

Inferior service rendered by Sandy Mutch, led naturally enough to inferior engagements obtained by him, and, of course, inferior wages resulting therefrom. He was not at all unfrequently out of employment, as has been already said, and being equally out of cash, he simply loafed about at home for the time being, duly attending country markets and all similar gatherings within reasonable distance, in search of interest and amusement. It frequently occurred to Sandy that trading in some shape in these markets would form a most congenial sphere of operations; but, then, he had no capital, and his credit among the whole range of his friends and acquaintances was not equal to a five-pound note.

At last a crisis came that was destined to direct Sandy Mutch's whole future course in life. Sandy had engaged himself as servant to a man of no ascertainable character in respect of moral temperament and habits; and after he had for a few weeks endeavoured to fulfil his engagement, the man of no particular character, in a fit of unreasoning fury, saw good to curse and swear at him with a considerable amount of emphasis, because, as he averred, Sandy was not doing properly the piece of work on which he was engaged.

"Vera lickly," replied Sandy, with much coolness, "for it's the exact wye that ye bade me."

"None o' yer impident chat here, sir, or I'll gar yer chafts cry knyp owre that ill-hung tongue o' yours," said the master.

"Ye'll maybe better jist try't than," was Sandy's answer, indicating, not altogether obscurely, that in him too the bellicose element existed in a latent state.

"Scoon'rel! D' ye think that ony maister 'll stan' that? Gae aboot yer bizness this moment, sir! Bonnie story that I sud nae only hae things connacht, but hae your ill win' to pit up wi' forbye."

So Sandy's master had ordered him about his business, and Sandy went without further demur. But experience had made him wary in such matters. And thus feeling himself to be clearly in the right for once, he took the precaution of offering renewal of his services in presence of witnesses. This being bluntly refused, Sandy had recourse to his legal remedy.

"Ou jist lat ye 'im get a turn afore Shirra Watson again," was the advice of an experienced acquaintance, whom Sandy saw fit to consult in the business. "He 's as weel kent there as he 's respeckit to the ootwith; an' at ony rate the Shirra 's aye a gweed freen to the servan'. Ye sud get a haud o' yon muckle, lang-leggit chiel' 'at was awgent for me ance—fat d' ye ca' 'im? He was some dear to pay, but, man, he has an awfu' tongue; an' he *did* rive them up the richt gate. Gin ye dee that there 's nae fear o' ye winnin' this time. No, no; I wud hae naething adee wi' that young chappies hardly oot o' the shall; they hae little rumgumption a hantle o' them, forbye't they 're fear't to speak oot. An' fat 's the eese o' a lawvyer gin he hiuna a gweed moufu' o' ill jaw!"

Accordingly Sandy Mutch, little to the comfort of the old souter, entered proceedings and summoned the man of no particular character into court; and with the best results. The excellent Sheriff took a favourable view of the case; and Sandy had the high satisfaction of being awarded his full wages and modified board wages, making together the sum of twelve pounds sterling.

"Noo, loon," said the souter, so soon as he had re-

covered from his astonishment at Sandy's unexpected good fortune, "Noo, loon, ye'll gi'e yer mither a note, an' pit the lave o' that siller in'o the Savin' Bank, to be gyang water to ye at anither time."

"Aw can dee better nor that wi' 't, ony wye," replied Sandy, in a tone indicative of entire confidence in his own capacity as an economist.

"Better wi' 't!" echoed the souter, under some excitement: "aw wud like to ken fat wye ye can dee better wi' 't?"

"There wud be some eese o' 't lyin' i' the bank wi' nae owreturn, an' only a triffle onwal at the year's en'."

The souter stared this time; and Sandy proceeded:—

"Aw 'm gyaun doon to the market the morn to see foo girsin' beasts 's sellin'; they 'll be an upwith market shortly, or it chates me."

The impulses of genius defy human forecast. Sandy Mutch's conduct had presented but a troublesome problem to his father hitherto; it had now attained the character of incomprehensibility. What could he think, or what could he say, about a son who was not merely impervious to his father's powers of reasoning, but had all at once spoken out with the air of a man entitled to talk down to the limited understanding of his benighted parent.

That evening, as the souter thought calmly over it, he could not avoid the reflection, that, provokingly stupid and disappointing as had been the conduct of his son previously, here, surely, was the climax of his self-willed folly in refusing to act on the barest rules of prudence even, in regard to the money so unexpectedly in his possession—rare commodity as it was in his experience. And his wife, who had been disappointed at not getting the "note" spoken of by her husband, was not on this occasion inclined to dissent from his opinion. But Sandy was perfectly firm, and only became the more taciturn the more that fresh attempts were made to re-open the subject. In short he would have, and he took, his own way.

Sandy Mutch's first purchase, and with which he returned from the market of which he had spoken, was a biggish "farrow" cow, speckled, with prominent haunch bones and rugged horns, and not in "high condition," as the dealers say. Sandy made the knowing people guess at the price; which they did, and hit above the mark considerably; and when Sandy told them that the actual price was "a croon oot o' sax poun'," they agreed that the farrow cow was a great "rug;" and as the purchase of the cow was directly followed by an equally judicious investment in a "stirk," the public opinion regarding Sandy Mutch got perplexed. Then when Sandy at first opportunity sold the animals at several shillings of profit each, the public opinion got more perplexed still. And thus did matters go on week by week.

"Nyod that loon o' the souter's 'll bleck Willie Futtrit, the couper 'imsel', gin he haud on the gate that he 's deein'," said an admiring acquaintance in view of certain of Sandy Mutch's business transactions. "They tell me 't he turn't a stirkie 't he bocht a fyou ouks syne heels-o'er-heid i' the last market."

But turning animals heels-o'er-head, technically, by doubling the purchase price, was not always easy, however sincere a man's intentions in that direction might be. And so it was that Sandy Mutch's transactions at times threatened to go somewhat stiffly in the opposite direction. He had gone to An'ersmas Fair, and in his eagerness to do business walked out the Glentons Road to meet sellers bringing their cattle to the fair. They were a primitive set the dwellers in the Glentons; far off any public highway, little disturbed by communication with the outer world; and thus left to grow up as "great nature," in the shape of rugged hills and brattling burns, fashioned them. Sandy Mutch had not walked far when he met a Glentons crofter, with his broad blue bonnet, his coat of hodden grey, furnished with metal buttons the size of

a George III. penny piece, and his knee breeches, and ribbed stockings. The crofter led a little half Highland-looking cow, in a hair-plaited halter; and his unsophisticated white haired boy, who had never hitherto witnessed such a stirring scene as that presented by Aikenmas Fair, went behind, carrying his father's hazel stick, to drive. The crofter asked four pounds for his cow: and Sandy Mutch offered three. The crofter declined, and they moved on toward the fair. A quarter of a mile had pretty well exhausted Sandy's vocabulary of depreciatory adjectives as applicable to the cow, and it had also advanced his offer by five shillings. The crofter wavered, but slightly. He still stuck to his price, and merely spoke of "a grand bonny coo" as the only deduction he would make. They had got to the place where the market "measmer" stood collecting the two pennies exigible for every cow, goat, or steer that passed; and they stopped till the coupers should be paid, and a red keil mark put on the cow's hind quarters, in token thereof. A rapid summary of the cow's deficiencies, uttered with some vehemence, followed by a final offer of "three-pennies," ultimately overcame the Glenorms reach, and a bargain was struck in the very "mou' o' the market."

Sandy Mutch's object was, as indeed his ardent and confident hope had been, to resell the Glenorms mart's cow forthwith, and realise at least ten shillings off the transaction. But, to his intense disappointment, no one seemed disposed to look at the cow with the purpose of buying her. The day was wearing on, and so far from his hope being realised, he had not yet been offered his own price. The farmers did not wish to have a Highland cow, and the coupers who passed frowned at it as a "muckle beastie."

"Nyuil, Sawney, ye're beast for anes wi' that auld cow wye: the beastie's nae richt, min," said Willie Fourth, handling the cow, and making the Glenorms mart's boy, who was now in sole charge during his father's temporary absence, lead it out a short space.

"He upheeld it, at ony rate," answered Sandy.

"Uphaud, or no uphaud, she 's as hide-bun 's an aul' wecht, min. Fat time did she grow better o' the stiffness, laddie?" asked Mr. Futtrit, addressing the boy.

"She wasna never oonweel," was the boy's perplexed reply.

"Dinna ye tell me, noo. Ye 've leern't yer lesson brawly, aw daursay; but ye 'll better jist tell the trowth aboot 'er."

The boy persisted in an indignant denial of the old couper's suggestion; but Sandy Mutch felt himself touched on the point of honour. Here was an animal dexterously bought from one of the most unsophisticated-looking of men, and which yet in open market, would not fetch its own price. Sandy was stung by the remarks of the senior coupers, and he determined to get out of his false position. If he had known the business a little better, he would have taken care to swallow his chagrin, and simply knock the best luck-penny he could out of the seller. He did not do that, but returning to the Glentons man, he roundly and hotly accused him of selling him, as a sound cow, an animal which was a confirmed "piner," and all but worthless. The Glentons man stoutly denied the accusation, which was loudly re-asserted amid a thickening group of sympathising onlookers.

"The beast 's as soun' 's ever a beast was; and there 's nae a handier creatur i' the market—I 'll tak' my aith upon 't," said the owner of the cow.

"Macksna," retorted Sandy Mutch, "ye 'll keep 'er for me. I 'll hae naething adee wi' 'er;" and he made to move off, as he spoke.

"Get the joodge o' the market—get the joodge o' the market," cried the onlookers, who by this time had got keenly interested in the squabble. "He canna be alloo't to brak' the man's market that gate."

One or two of the crowd bustled off to fetch the judge of the market, who was soon found in the person

of Tammas Rorison, the banker and "bailie" of the Burgh, who happened also to be agent for the owner of the market stance, and custodier of the "market customs" at An'ersmas Fair. The banker was a man of middle height, but greatly more than medium rotundity, whose strongly marked face was encumbered with little in the way of beard, beyond a pair of strictly defined whiskers in the middle of his cheeks, although his head was crowned by a dense crop of stiffish hair, inclining to red in colour, but now sprinkled with grey. A stout tuft of this hair was always brushed up right in front, and when the banker stood erect, put his legs together, and hooked his thumbs into the arm-holes of his waistcoat, which was his favourite attitude, he bore a curious resemblance to an enormously overgrown seal set upon its tail.

"Fat 's adoo—fat 's adoo?" asked the banker; "ony chiel' fechtin', or fou?"

It was explained that a trading dispute only had occurred.

"Ou ay, some coupin' transaction. Fesh them this gate, oot o' the thrang a wee bit, an' we 'll seen sattle that."

Tammas Rorison, the judge of An'ersmas Fair, was a man whose power in his own domain was as potently exercised as that of many rulers; and on being summoned before him, Sandy Mutch not only felt impelled to obey without demur, but also that his capability of defence was at the same time sensibly diminished. The judge straightened himself up in his usual attitude, and heard the story of the seller of the cow. He then called for Sandy Mutch's statement.

"Weel," said the judge, "I wudna won'er nor ye 've promis't something owre an' abeen fat the beastie 's worth; but that 's nae rizzon for brakin' yer bargain, man. Fat! a fau'ty beast is 't? We canna tak' your word for that, ye ken. The beast 's there as ye see 't. Fat proof hae ye o' 't bein' a piner?—Willie Futtrit!

Weel, peer man, I daursay Willie's word wud be jist as gweed 's his aith aboot buyin' or sellin' a coo; an' like aneuch he wud swear black an' blue till obleege a neebour, though he never saw the coo in 's life afore. But I think we 'll aiven be deein' wantin' 'im this turn. Come ye awa' an' pay the man for 's beastie; an' see an' mak' yer best o''t. Fowk 's nane the waur o' some bocht wit files."

There was no appeal from the judge of the market; and the Glentons man got his money accordingly; the only bit of threatened revenge, when the man asked at what time he would take possession of his purchase, being the declaration from Sandy Mutch that he "wud gar 'im stan' there wi' 't till sin-doon," as "a' law" allowed him to do; a threat which he did not fully carry out, for the simple reason that it would have been inflicting punishment on himself equally with his opponent.

CHAPTER IV.

THE COUPER FULL FLEDGED.

The transactions recorded, though all very well for a beginning, and giving good promise of greater things to come, could not long satisfy the ambition of a man who had the true cattle-coaping spirit within him.

Besides certain annual fairs, there were within a radius of eight or nine miles several markets that occurred at much shorter intervals. At each and all of these Sandy Mutch was a regular attendant. Occasionally he bought an animal or two, and sold them again before he left the market; occasionally, too, he made a plunge and bought several. In this latter case he at once threw himself abroad for buyers in a seemingly cursory, yet not unknowing, way.

"Weel, I micht brak' the bottle to obleege an acquaintance, though I canna sell the lave sae weel—will ye gi'e's a bode?"

If the man gave a "bode" for one or two "stirks," Sandy would loudly declare that he had offered less for what formed really "the pick" of the lot than the average "unwieldy" price to himself. How far the statement might square with the facts, he would know best himself, but in any case when he got in tow with a buyer, or buyers, he knew that he was in a fair way to sell out again, or bring his stock to such reduced dimensions by the end of the market as would enable him to clear scores by receiving cash with one hand, and paying it away with the other.

Occasionally, too, it happened that he neither bought

nor sold. His object was profit, and unless he encountered a man with whom he imagined he could drive a bargain somewhat under the market price, that object could not be served. He was not always successful, even to the extent of holding his own, for it would happen now and again that another couper, or other tricky person, would contrive to land a faulty beast upon him, of which he could get quit only by making a loss; and at times the balance of wits was so even between buyer and seller that he found himself in the position of being obliged to re-sell even a "fau't-free" beast at exactly the same price as he had paid for it, and that perhaps after undergoing the trouble of taking it home from one market and out to another, not to speak of its board meanwhile. But in any case it was business, bargain-making, and among the set to whom Sandy was now getting fully assimilated there was a strong belief in the simple "owre-turn o' siller" as a commercially wholesome proceeding apart from questions of productiveness or profit.

They were not a particularly reputable set those coo-coupers. Mostly bleared, dilapidated-looking elderly characters; generally, not invariably, of the male sex; fond of tobacco and snuff, and fonder of whisky. Their wits were sharp enough, and their language was not choice, though it was a general belief that amongst them downright "leein'" and systematic deception were not practised on such an elaborate and complicated scale quite as among their contemporaries who dealt in old and half-worn horses.

In the earlier part of his career, both rapid manipulation and an occasional "hitch" from a brother couper were needed to enable Sandy Mutch to meet his engagements in making payments. But a strong report once and again sent abroad of large profits secured by certain transactions by and bye gave distinct form and body to the impression that Sandy was a prosperous trader; and his credit rose in a wonderful way. No-

body now doubted his verbal promise to pay, hardly even the bank as represented by its local agent, Mr. Tammas Rorison. He had now begun to purchase larger cattle from the farmers, and happy indeed was the seller who could secure his best "bode" when he was really of a mind to buy; for it was known that Sandy Mutch would not "haggle" over a few shillings, inasmuch as if he bought at a full price he would sell to equally good purpose, and despatch of business was of consequence to a man like him. In summer he rented a field or two of pasture grass; in winter he purchased a number of acres of turnips for the sustenance of stock. And as locomotion a-foot did not adequately serve the exigencies of his increasing business, he got a horse and gig for personal use. His "machine," as Sandy termed the gig, became familiarly known, not only at the markets, but at many a substantial farmstead, where Sandy Mutch was an occasional caller in quest of stock to buy, and where he was ever a welcome guest, received on a footing, if not of perfect equality, certainly of entire familiarity, and his judgment deferred to in matters of bovine economy.

That this rapid and steady rise in his fortunes should beget a little envy in the minds of some of the less generous of Sandy Mutch's contemporaries, and the less successful amongst his rivals, was, of course, natural. There were those who even asserted that certain of his transactions were no cleaner than they ought to be; that in addition to over-reaching simple people without remorse when he got the opportunity, he had not scrupled to resort systematically to any of the underhand devices known to the lowest of his class that would serve his end for the time. These people also spoke of Sandy as "a peer ignorant slype," who "mith ken aboot a nowte beast weel anench b' guess o' ee; but for ony kin' o' beuk lear cudna tell ye a B fae a bull's fit," and as being at best but the daily companion of a set of very questionable characters.

Like many of the candid things that our friends say about us, if the spirit of these utterances was somewhat harsh, their substance was not perhaps far from the truth. But then what need for "book lear," if a man felt no sense of loss, and suffered nothing in pocket or general credit by its absence? And it was just this special power of measuring and estimating cattle by "guess o' ee,' that constituted Sandy Mutch's distinguishing faculty in a business point of view, and enabled him to get on. It would have puzzled him hopelessly to be asked to calculate the value of a carcase of beef—the number of pounds weight and the price per pound being given as the two factors; yet with the live animal before him, Sandy would, by a sort of intuitive mental process, fix its "dead weight," as it stood, with surprising exactitude, and attach the value accordingly as regulated by "ripeness" of flesh, current price, and so on. It was by the assiduous exercise of this inborn faculty that he had made his rising reputation.

Sandy Mutch's mother was amply satisfied with her son. Sandy was to her now simply a man of large business and ample means, through whose relationship to her she was entitled to a sort of reflected glory. And, to do him justice, Sandy had of late shown a certain readiness to recompense maternal attention to his needs, by now and again handing over to his mother a proportion of the loose silver and copper coinage that occasionally accumulated in his trouser pockets. His home was still chiefly under the paternal roof, though in marketing and otherwise he was much absent; and if this made his domestic habits less regular than might have been desirable, there was a great deal to be allowed for in the case of a person of such importance in the community. To the old souter, the matter wore a less gratifying aspect. His desire would still have been to see his son addict himself to some form of honest industry whatever it might be, and he was far from certain that "couping" cattle was to be strictly so defined.

"He'll coup till he coup owre the tail i' the gutter some day; an' that'll be seen yet," said the souter.

"Man, wud naething satisfee ye," said the souter's wife, in reply—"Aw'm seer he's a muckle ta'en oot man by'se fat he wud 'a ever been sittin' wi' the lapstane on's knee. Fat has a' your nain hard wark, an' a' yer heid o' lear deen for's? Little mair nor get the bare bit an' the dud, an' keep a sober aneuch reef abeen oor heids. Fat for wudna the laddie try something that fowk can mak' a livin' at?"

The souter was, as usual, talked down but not convinced, and he merely added—"Be the mailin gryte or sma', fowk sud win their livin' b' the honest eese o' their han's, fan they hinna ta'en patience to be qualifeet for deein''t wi' their harns. It'll come to nae gweed wi''im ere a' be deen."

It might be; only the potential facts were against the souter, meanwhile at least; for was it not the case that by common consent Sandy was doing a thriving business, and bidding more than fairly to be one of the prosperous men of the place: that he had already virtually risen out of the rank of the mere coo-couper, and gained a sort of indirect recognition even from men of the status of Patrick Ellison Scurr, Esq., the great grazier and dealer, who had oftener than once effected a purchase of "stores" through the medium of Sandy as a sort of agent.

CHAPTER V.

AN INCIDENTAL OCCURRENCE AND THE SUBSEQUENT ORDEAL.

It has been already told how Sandy Mutch had attained, and decisively made the fact known that he had attained, belief in himself. A very important element, without doubt, in many kinds of success. But some men who possess abundant and unquestioning belief in themselves fail utterly in securing a corresponding belief on the part of their fellow-men, or, indeed, in gaining their confidence in even a moderate degree. Not seldom, however, the two go together; and the man who has unwavering faith in himself obtains the adhesive belief of his fellows on what seem wonderfully easy terms. It is not for me to say that it was so with Sandy Mutch. True, he had been an admitted dunce in his earlier years, and thereafter, even, seemed in some danger of turning out to be a man whose place in creation had not been discovered. But latterly—well, we need not repeat. Whatever envious or ill-natured people might say, Sandy had reached a position, which nobody whose good opinion he cared for, doubted or despised. He had abundant elbow-room to all appearance, and the proverb which speaks of "makin' a speen or spoilin' a horn," embodied the advice he had begun to give to less experienced men than himself.

But, in such a career as his, there could not fail to come in little incidents not of a strictly business character, which yet had their interest as illustrations of human life, and one of these may be here briefly narrated.

On a certain market day, in the early afternoon, when business was not much past its height, and men and cattle still clustered thickly together on the Green, the crowd near by Rob Findlater's tent was startled by several loud shouts from the interior of the tent, followed by a crashing of glasses, the screams of Rob's female assistants, and the visible appearance of two or three figures once and again dabbing against the interior of the canvas walls. And presently Rob rushed out bareheaded and in his shirt sleeves, as his style was on market days. Pushing through the knot of people that had crowded toward the entrance to peep in, Rob, in a state of wild excitement and wrath, shouted loudly for "the poleece!"

It so happened that both the district sergeant and a plain constable of that efficient civil force were near by, who at once obeyed Rob's call for their services, and directly made their way into the interior of the tent. What precisely had happened it was not easy for those outside on the Green to discover. In a little, comparative order and quiet had evidently been restored within the tent, and the constable was placed sentry at the door to keep off intruders. But clearly something serious had been done or threatened, for Rob Findlater was too familiar with the ordinary course of mere surface ebullitions to seek the aid of the police without due cause. Some said a man had been "fell't" by another man; some said he was "stickit;" and some that his skull had merely suffered a sensible "clour." Whatever it might be, it seemed fortunate that "medical aid," in the shape of the village doctor, was quite at hand; and the next step was to call in his professional services. By and by the victim was declared to be Willie Futtrit, the well-known veteran coo-couper, whose brother, Francie Futtrit, was farmer of Dykeside. His injuries through blows received were understood to be—considerable damage to the present visual powers of an eye, the loss of a few teeth, and a scratch more or

less about the nose sufficient to make that organ bleed rather freely. The part that caused the most profound excitement was the statement that these blows had been administered by Sandy Mutch. Evidently more would not be easily learnt just then, for after the interruption that had occurred, Rob Findlater had got crusty and taciturn; and, with the approval of the police sergeant, and the concurrence of certain persons inside the tent, who had been "ta'en witnesses," he by and by abruptly announced that business was suspended, and the tent closed for the time in so far as the general public were concerned.

It were needless here to repeat the fifty-and-one different forms in which the occurrence in Rob Findlater's tent found circulation during the succeeding nine days. Its origin was stated to have been certain gratuitous allegations made by Willie Futtrit with a view to depreciate the character of a lot of cattle sold by Sandy Mutch to an amateur farmer immediately before; the implication, of course, being that as the man was a greenhorn, advantage had been taken of the fact to cheat him in a degree at which even the honour that prevails among coupers might legitimately revolt. It became understood that Willie Futtrit gave good promise of reasonably speedy recovery; indeed, there were not wanting those who from the outset were inclined, rather uncharitably perhaps, to scout the idea that anything really very serious could have happened to that gentleman; and, in confirmation of their view, they offered such remarks as that "Willie 's been in owre mony sharries for that," and that "there 's a heap o' killin' in a caird." At any rate it was understood that Willie was in a fair way, all things considered; and it being the case that in his normal state he was not an exact counterpart of Adonis in figure or face—plainly, he was an ugly, snuffy little man—there seemed reason to believe that the permanent disfigurement resulting from the injuries inflicted upon him would

hardly amount to an appreciable deterioration. Moreover, as it was sufficiently well known that he had "a curs't ill tongue, the creatur," it was admitted to be, after all, matter of doub: whether Willie Futtrit had got much more than he had fairly merited.

One cause of general regret, when the matter could be looked at in cool blood, was that Tammas Rorison had not been in the way to give judgment on it off-hand. In former days, Tammas had been known to administer prompt and impartial justice in such squabbles by fining both parties, and advising them to "haud wi' less drink neist time." Only the policeman was less omnipresent then, and the matter was now into the hands of the police authorities, so that there was no help for it but await the issue in the Sheriff Court. A formidable case it might be for the "summary" roll, but luckily for Sandy Mutch it was got so adjusted, and bail accepted.

By the day fixed for hearing the case, Sandy had taken care to retain the shrewd lawyer who on a former occasion had served him so well. The charge was one of "assault to the effusion of blood and serious injury of the person;" and when Sandy Mutch had taken his place in the dock, and by the instructions of his lawyer pleaded "Not Guilty," the public prosecutor announced —"Call William Futtrit." In due course, the bar officer ushered Willie into court. By a certain amount of persuasion, amounting to something like objurgation, he was induced to enter the witness box, where he exhibited a strong tendency to be seated. That position being inadmissable in the circumstances, he was next, with some difficulty, prevailed upon to turn his face toward the Sheriff, and away from the dog-Latin inscription on the gallery front, which told people to respect the landmarks which their forefathers had set up. When he had got so far as to hold up his hand and take the oath with a kind of passable approach to "due form," he leant forward on the slight apology

for a desk in front of him, ready to proceed. From the story given by the witness in his "examination-in-chief," it appeared that on the day of the alleged assault Willie Futtrit, meeting Sandy Mutch in Rob Findlater's tent, had, in the most friendly spirit possible, sat down near by him for the purpose of having a little conversation relating to their common business; that, in course of this conversation, Mutch had got very unaccountably angry, and extremely abusive, even for him; and that on witness starting to his feet for his own safety, Mutch had got the whip hand of him, by gaining a perpendicular posture first, and forthwith administering a series of blows; could not say how many; "it cam' like the shot o' a gun;" the result, after a brief tussle, during which witness endeavoured "to keep aff o' 'imsel," being to leave him prostrate below one of the tent seats, with serious damage to his person, as per inventory of wounds. "No; we had no drink thegither; cudna say if Mutch had drink upon him; have seen him waur."

The cross-examination was by no means such smooth sailing. The first question put by Sandy Mutch's agent was—

"Did you, on entering Findlater's tent that day, go and thrust yourself unbidden into Mutch's company?"

Willie Futtrit had his wits quite sufficiently about him to appreciate the desirability of shirking an affirmative reply, and he said—

"It'll be lang to the day that I'll seek to force my company on ony man."

"I'm not concerned with what you may do in the future, which is no doubt problematical. Will you answer my question—Did you, of your own accord, and without the least invitation, thrust yourself into the company of Mutch and his friends?"

"I did naething o' the sort; ony ane kens that there's nae preevacy in a tent; fowk maun gyang faur they can win."

"Then, you mean to say that there was no room for you elsewhere in the tent?"

"I'm nae sayin' naething aboot it. Keerious thing gin a man wudna get leave to choise his nain seat in a place 't 's as free to the common caird wi' a saxpence in 's pouch as it is to the laird o' the lan'."

"Even though it should be at the cost of intruding yourself where you are not wanted? Well, you have told us of this conversation that you persisted in having with Mutch.—Were you disappointed when he and his friends did not offer you any drink?"

"I can pay for drink for mysel' fan I want it. I socht nane o' their drink," answered Willie indignantly.

"Oh, of course not. Only you let it be known that it would have been a handsomer thing had they given you a share of what was going—Eh?"

"Gin people dinna k-now fat it is to be genteel there's little eese in tellin' them."

"And it was after you felt that you had been ungenteely treated that you began to blow up Mutch; and to tell everybody in the tent, who chose to listen, that he had just cheated an ignorant man, in selling him four cattle?"

"No, I didna."

"Tell us what happened then."

"They gaed on wi' their newse."

"Yes, but what of this lot of cattle; when the conversation about them began?"

"I min' naething aboot it."

"Did you say that they were sold for more than they were worth; and that the buyer had been 'brunt to the black back'?"

"I didna say that ony wye."

"Recollect what you did say then, and be kind enough to tell us."

"I tell ye I min' naething aboot it—nae won'er wi' a heid dunner't 's mine 's been; an' ye needna seek to gar me tell lees."

"N-o," replied the agent, nodding his head and speaking very deliberately, "N-o ; I should think that, in your case, very unnecessary. We are only trying to extract a little of the truth—Did you describe the lot of cattle, which had been represented to the buyer as of best quality, as 'three hide-bun' wallydraggles, an' the foort ane a —— eeseless buffalo brute'?"

"Aw mith'a mention't a buffalo ; but I dinna bann."

Hereat there was laughter in the Court, which the judge, who seemed to take the matter with an air of amused easiness, appeared nowise unwilling to enjoy. He wanted to know what the term "buffalo" signified in this connection ; and why it should be a term of opprobrium. To this the examining counsel replied that his lordship had better take the information from some of the skilled witnesses rather than from him, though he could assure him of his own knowledge that it was a most grave charge for any man to bring against another that of selling a buffalo under pretence that it was an ordinary bullock ; a charge such as Futtrit well knew was fitted seriously to injure the character of a person like Mutch. Here the judge made a half aside observation, which to those near him sounded very like something about "No much character to spill between the twae ;" and the counsel, who had evidently caught the remark, whatever it was, replied in the like spirit, "Well—I shou'd not wish to build my case on that feature, my lord!"—"Did you, when you lay down in the tent floor, kick right and left with your feet, and seize Mr. Mutch's hand in your teeth!"

"I was ca'd owre like a fell't nowte. I didna lie doon nor kick nae ane."

"You did not kick—you only bit his thumb.—Well!"

"Aw never gat a haud o''t to bite yet."

"Then you only tried and didn't succeed ; your inability and not your will standing in the way."

"You may go," said the good-natured judge ; and Willie Futtrit then left the witness perch.

Then the examination proceeded. Rob Findlater was called and one of his assistants; as were also a few persons from the general body of occupants of the tent; with a couple of farmers in whose company Sandy Mutch had been when the fray with Willie Futtrit occurred, and whose testimony was given for the defence. The doctor, who had been at the trouble to write out a formal report, gave his evidence at length, in good set terms, and with great precision. The report bristled with technical phrases about "the dental" and "nasal regions," "abrasion of the cuticle," and so forth: the sum of Esculapius's testimony being, in plain English, a broken nose, and two teeth knocked out. The united evidence of the eye-witnesses did not give a particularly lucid view of the facts in their connection; though, on the whole, under the skilful examination and cross-examination of the counsel for the defence, it was cumulative against Willie Futtrit, in so far that he certainly had somehow adjoined himself to Sandy Mutch, who evidently did not want him; and that beyond this he had shouted out with sufficient loudness about the wally draggles and the buffalo to compel everybody in the tent who was not stone deaf to hear him. On one point here there was a slight divergence of opinion. It was not as to whether Willie had or had not used the first adjective attributed to him in describing the buffalo, but as to whether he had used the last substantive or a still uglier one beginning with the same consonant; one of the witnesses, who was incidentally questioned as to Willie's general abstinence from "banning," returning for answer the suggestive query, "Div ye think that ever the man wud 'a fun 's wecht amo' sic a set gin he cudna bann wi' the best o' them?"

Then came the speeches for the prosecution and the defence. The latter was prefaced by the reading of testimonials on behalf of Sandy Mutch. There was first a joint certificate written out by the largest farmer in Sandy's native parish, and signed by several others.

It set forth that they had known "the barer from his invancy," for so the worthy man had contrived to spell "infancy." No doubt they had had the will to say much good, and to say it strongly, but being deficient in superlatives, the subscribers merely set forth that Sandy Mutch was "a peaceable and obleegin' man, and industrious person." The other testimonial was from Patrick Ellison Scurr, Esq., and certified in a rather dry and matter-of-fact style that Sandy had been known to him for some time as a young man who gave good promise as a "cattle jobber." Sandy's agent made the most of this, as showing that, while there no doubt was a low class of persons trafficking in cheap and inferior cattle, and ready, as the evidence led that day proved, to force themselves in, with brazen impudence, where their presence was not desired, his client, on the very high testimony now submitted, belonged to a different and altogether much superior grade. And, on the whole, considering the outrageous nature of the insult offered to his client by a person whose character his Lordship would not require him to describe, he thought the sentence should be one of acquittal; or, at most, a purely nominal fine, to remind the community that no private citizen could, even under the strongest provocation, wisely take the law into his own hands or administer correction, however well-merited.

The learned Sheriff had not thought it needful to harass himself in the way of taking notes of the evidence given; neither did he feel it needful to go into an elaborate deliverance now. He remarked that a very vulgar and somewhat violent assault had been proved, such as no person who wished to gain or retain a respectable character would have been guilty of. And looking at the youth and physical bulk of the accused as compared with the waning strength and limited stature of the person assaulted it should strike anybody as unmanly. Possibly the provocation had been considerable, but no provocation would justify such outrages; and the accused must pay a fine of two pounds.

The expectation among Sandy Mutch's acquaintances had been that a heavier sentence would probably be inflicted; and thus, their congratulations on the result of the trial were very hearty. Their sympathies in the matter that led to it had been largely with him from the outset. In consequence, Sandy's character suffered nothing in their estimation. Naturally enough Willie Futtrit was displeased. The fact that his lost teeth should not have been estimated at a higher rate than one pound each, let alone other loss and damage, was so bad as to be positively insulting. And when a fine was going at anyrate Willie had the belief that it was simply iniquity, "framed by a law," that prevented him, as the chief sufferer, from obtaining the lion's share of the sum awarded. Therefore, when the proper official paid him with a miserable three shillings and sixpence, in name of expenses for attending the Court as a witness, and told him that any further remeid against Sandy Mutch must come in the form of a civil action, at his own charges, he returned home in a mood some way short of amiable.

CHAPTER VI.

THE COUPER DOWN.

THERE was only one circumstance connected with the court case over which Sandy Mutch grieved. "Time's money wi' me, ye see," was an observation which Sandy, in common with other men whose thoughts are toward a great future, had, about this period of his life, got into the habit of making; and surely it could not have happened more awkwardly, even had the public prosecutor and the Sheriff been filled with malevolence against him than that the court should have been fixed for a "St. Saar's day." But so it had been; and Sandy Mutch had been broken of one of the great days of the season, in a trading point of view; for St. Sair's came but once a year, and he had trusted to doing a large stroke of business on that day. Sandy complained of his disappointment much and loudly at the time, and for a long while after; for the dried-up state of the pastures, and the critical position of the turnip crop, had brought about a juncture of affairs by which feeble men were paralysed, and only the bold and perspicacious found themselves in their element. Two days later, and a copious rain had changed the conditions, and made buying or selling an easy matter for any man with a single pennyweight of brains in his skull. Of course, fortune was still before him for the winning, and Sandy Mutch was not the man, by any means, to give in the chase faintly; but lost ground at times is hard to regain. So argued the Couper.

And surely it were more than the conditions of this mortal life permit that even the most brilliant career

should not at one point or another suffer temporary eclipse. It is, in the very nature of things, a phase of the inevitable; which, however, like the passing cloud on the sun's disc, serves only to make more magnificent the undimmed power of the luminary, when it has emerged from the momentary shade. It was hardly to be anticipated that Sandy Mutch would be for ever exempt from the adverse contingencies of a trader's life accruing in one way or another. Neither was he; for by and by rumours got abroad that Sandy, as a business man, had on a sudden found himself in deep water.

"Ye dinna mean to say 't the couper 's fail't?"

"Ay, man, the couper 's broken."

"Keep 's an' guide 's, fa wud 'a thocht o' Sawney Mutch sittin' doon noo!"

"Weel, min, he was gyaun a gryte len'th for a chiel' that begood wi' an aul' coo or twa less nor half-a-dizzen o' year syne; as you an' me tee min' weel."

"Ay, but loshtie, man, Sawney was thocht as gweed 's the' bank ony day wi' the farmers. There 's fyou wud bleek 'im anee nowte beasts, buyin' or sellin', lat aleen a fair swap; an' he 's hed a gryte owreturn o' siller."

"Owre muckle, aw doot. He had been sen'in them to Lunnon fi' the dizzen ilka i'ther ouk, hale-wheel, this tide, lippen'd to the tae litt to releive the tither; an' syne wi' the fi' han' in a backgaen market, Sawney begood to fin' oot that he had wun to the en' o' 's tether."

"Man, it 'll mak' an' unco reerie i' the kwintra side. Fat 'll they dee wi' 'im? Will they jile 'im?"

"Hoot toot, jile 'im! Nae fears o' that. They war sellin' me thrit it wud be sowder't up, mair nor likly. Man, they canna weel afford to lat 'im gae to the gowff. Mony a gweed nuk o' siller has he paid for beasts; an' ov coorse sewerals o' them wud lickly be cautioners, or hae len'it sooms till 'im."

"The bank keeps the like o' 'im up af'en."

"Ou, ay; an' the bank'll ken fat for, come o' ither fowk 't like."

"Weel, I'm taul', at onyrate, that there 'll be fat they ca' a 'composition'—payin' them sae muckle i' the poun' aff o' han' like."

"To lat Sawney win to the road again, in coorse?"

"N—weel, aw cudna say aboot that; aw 'm some dootfu', min. It 's nae sae easy gettin' yersel' gaither't fan ance ye 're flung o' your braid back."

"There was a heap o' them liket to deal wi' 'im, though, raither nor the regular butchers, an' that—men 't they hed transackit wi' never so lang, an' 't hed aye the siller ready i' their han'. Ye see they aye thocht Sawney wud rin raither abeen the market price afore he wud wunt a lottie o' beasts."

"Jist like the fairmers; they dinna ken fan they get the vailue o' fat they 're sellin'; an' 'll rin their risk o' dealin' wi' ony weirdless loup-the-cat for the sake o' a skinnin' mair nor fat a thing 's really worth."

"Ay, man, they ken richt foo to grip at a' that they can get, though it sud be never so oonrizzonable or wheety like; an' neist time they 'll jist gae as far the tither gate drammin' thegither, haudin' the gill stoup upo' a'body that comes within cry, an' near han' strivin' aboot fa 'll be latt'n' pay maist o' the drink."

These sentiments, uttered by a couple of interested contemporaries, indicate not inaccurately the position of affairs, and the tone of public feeling in relation to Sandy Mutch's pecuniary difficulties In his time of growing prosperity Sandy had found no difficulty in obtaining liberal "accommodation" from Tammas Rorison the banker. While paper of his to a certain amount was kept floating by the use of sundry names of farmers amongst whom he transacted business, the banker could not in the case of such a valuable and desirable customer—who, if mismanaged or disobliged,

might have got into the hands of the rival banker—hesitate to grant, at his own risk, an occasional overdraft not covered by any outside security. And now that Sandy had suffered what he termed a "back-jar," he was just a little confused as to the amount of either his liabilities or assets, book-keeping and accounting, in even their simplest forms, being arts to him utterly unknown. Naturally enough the banker, who had had opportunity of knowing his man sufficiently well on more sides of him than one, knew also much better than any one else how the liabilities stood, and by taking Sandy in hand personally, as a sort of an informal trustee, he next got at the assets with sufficient accuracy to enable him to declare, as he did without any long delay, that the composition must be six and eightpence in the pound. The creditors were asked to approve of this, and they approved in a general way accordingly. It was understood that the paper drawn in Sandy's favour would all be made good at the bank, or several other failures must occur. An undesirable event this latter, and not an inevitable one if things were judiciously gone about. So the banker hinted, and the banker knew and could handle the material he had to deal with as well as any man. Some of the "accommodations" were just a little inconvenient of adjustment. There was Burnside, for example, who had given Sandy accommodation for twenty-five pounds, being the season's rent of a grass field; and Sandy had obliged Burnie in a similar way with twenty-eight pounds to clear his twelvemonths-old manure account. Deprived of Sandy's name on both bills, Burnie felt he should be in rather a tight place with his Martinmas rent to meet, and a hard "scrape" to get that up; but then, by Sandy's failure, the smaller bill, as the banker pointed out, could happily be reduced to seventeen pounds in place of twenty-five pounds, and by a determined push among men circumstanced like himself, Burnie, for correspond-

ing favours granted by him to them, got those obliging neighbours to take up a side of the two bills, and, like himself, hope on. True, the trifle of discount went against him; but otherwise Burnie did not feel himself worse than before. He was still a solvent man, he understood, and he pitied Mutch, "peer stock," who had "fa'in' i' the rive" so undeservedly.

Some folks there were, who, when matters were arranged, said the banker, though he had not sought to "rank" in the list of Sandy Mutch's creditors, had contrived to keep himself and the institution he represented pretty-well scatheless; but in conceding fresh "accommodations," as he had done in certain cases, it was held undeniable that the banker had acted a very friendly part to those agriculturists who were involved in the couper's failure. No doubt there were grumblers among the outside creditors. Two or three persons who had sold cattle to Sandy a week or two before he was known to be bankrupt, threatened to be unpleasant. They had got no payment previous to the stoppage, and now they had to accept six and eightpence per pound over the bank counter, in place of the full "notes," bating a "luckpenny" and the usual allowance of "bargain ale." These grumbled loudly, and seemed determined to cherish a feeling of ill-usage in the matter, despite the banker's sharp rebuke of their unreasonableness; yet was it felt by the general public that Sandy Mutch's "sittin' doon" had been attended with less disastrous effects than could have been anticipated, considering the extent and unexpectedness of the collapse; and that these good results were largely due to the banker's skill there was no room to doubt.

CHAPTER VII.

UP AGAIN.

To Sandy Mutch, personally, the event of his failure brought a certain measure of discouragement. Deprived of his gig, which he had honourably given up, with the animal that drew it, for behoof of his creditors, he was again reduced to mere pedestrian activity. Of course, he was quite destitute of cash; and Tammas Rorison, the banker, who was for the time being very shy on that topic, when his client endeavoured to approach it, simply urged, "Hae patience, Sandy, man; an' keep yer een aboot ye. It wudna leuk sair to be gyaun aboot wi' a fu' pouch eenoo."

In the circumstances, Sandy Mutch found it beyond his compass just yet to do even a limited business in swine dealing, which had presented itself to his mind as a hopeful and more easily attainable field than that of trading in larger cattle. And so, for a time, he again loafed about his native hamlet, finding shelter under the paternal roof, and awakening wrathful, but as hitherto ineffectual criticisms on his habits by his father the souter.

But Sandy must have in his hand somehow; and thus, in course of a few months, he was again to be seen bustling about in the cattle markets. The scope of his operations was different, but trafficking in cattle was still his care: and at the close of the market, he was ordinarily to be seen collecting and taking the charge of "droving" to the "Toon," or elsewhere, the lot purchased by one of the men who did a considerable

business as a butcher and grazier. And not exclusively as a common drover, paid at the rate of half-a-crown a-day and his drink, when employed. By common consent, Sandy had a large measure of skill as a buyer of stock; and it was not in reason that this his talent should be allowed to rust utterly. Sandy had been once and again trusted to do a stroke in buying in his master's behalf, when his master, for reasons sufficient to himself, wished to keep in the background, and not reveal his identity to the seller.

There was another line, too, open to the man of no capital and an equal amount of principle; only it must be prosecuted as a conjunct business; and in this wise: Two of the fraternity, or better still, three, met at the opening of the fair, and, by common understanding, promptly fixed on a likely lot of grazing beasts in the hands of some small farmer—if a verdant person, so much the better. Couper No. 1 first "priced," and offered for the lot in a matter-of-course way. He would keep the "exposer" in hand up to his station in the market, and then subject the beasts to a fresh handling, thumping them about freely with his stick, and candidly expatiating on their weak points, but winding up with, "Still an' on, aw'll stan' to my bode—the aiven notes an' a gweed luckpenny back but ye'll need to mak' up yer min' aboot it. Nae man 'll mak' 's siller oot o' them; only aw 'm jist needin' something o' the kin' mysel' the day."

He has offered, say, twenty pounds, and the price asked for the stirks is twenty-five pounds. The exposer is half indignant and wholly disappointed at the couper's appreciation of his stirks; but the couper does not put himself about for that; and after badgering the man for half an hour or so he sums up—

"Weel, here's my han'; (he extends the palm accordingly), a twenty-pun note, an' I'll lea'e the luckpenny to yoursel'. It 's mair nor the creaturs 's worth to ony ane; mere hunger't atomies, an' a back-gaen market tee."

"I'll raither tak' them hame again," exclaims the irritated owner of the stirks.

"An' ye'll get it adee, man, an' tak' less siller neist time—but please yersel'," retorts Couper No. 1, who now retreats, giving "the wink" to Couper No. 2; and Couper No. 2 has hold of the man accordingly before any other buyer can put in a word. Couper No. 2 bids him ask twenty pounds and he'll maybe make an offer.—"Ye seerly dinna ken fat wye the market's gyaun, min. Offer't twenty poun' already! Nae fear o' ye."

"The man's nae oot o' cry yet that offer't it," exclaims the seller.

"Weel, man, there wus twa feels; and the ane that refees't the siller was the biggest feel o' the twa," is the reply of Couper No. 2; "the man's kent that ye wusna wantin' to sell."

"He kent brawly 't aw wud sell, gin I gat vailue for my beasts."

"Ye dinna ken fat yer speakin' aboot, min; lat's hear a price 't fowk can bid ye something, an' nae waste my time an' lose yer market baith."

Couper No. 2 is less reputable-looking and more scurrilous of speech than Couper No. 1 even; and he keeps an uncommonly sharp look-out lest any *bona fide* dealer who would really buy the stirks at their full market value should indicate a disposition to hang on, waiting his chance. The least appearance of anything of the sort he violently resents as a dishonourable attempt to break his marketing. In due course Couper No. 2, who has persecuted the owner of the stirks for three quarters of an hour, gives place to another of the same "kidney." It may be No. 3, or quite as likely No. 1 returned again, the essential point being to keep outsiders off until the owner of the stirks either capitulates or is seen to be hopelessly obstinate.

"Weel, laird, are ye gyaun to tak' siller yet?" asks Couper No. 1; and he adds an emphatic declaration

anent his own good-natured softness in ever again "lattin his een see" the laird after the treatment he had previously given him.

"Nae the siller that ye offer't, ony wye," replies the owner of the stirks, in an apparently decided tone.

But the couper knows what all this is worth, and what may be the result of a renewed assault, and he continues his attack. If the man is in circumstances that compel him to sell, he like enough begins by and by to waver in his resolution, which the couper quickly perceives, and loses no time in trying to drive home his bargain by generously offering to "refar it to ony man that kens the vailue o' beasts i' the market, this minit." Only a prompt conclusion either way is, he hints, imperative.

The root principle of this mode of trading, of course, is simply to step dexterously in between the legitimate buyer and the seller; keep the latter closely in hand under a series of assaults, till, through dint of sheer chicanery, a bargain has been concluded, and then fall back on the regular trader, or other *bona fide* buyer, to re-purchase at market price, and by so doing put the first buyers, who, to a certainty, have not as many shillings in pocket as they have promised to pay in pounds, in funds to "clear their feet," and allow them to profit in proportion as they have been successful in getting their purchases at under value. Sandy Mutch at an earlier stage of his career had on his own account attempted a little of what might be termed sharp dealing. And he now participated in a few partnership transactions of the kind just described; but, to do him justice, he did not go heartily into the line. The amount of "plunder" was not always enough to be satisfactory; occasionally its division could not be effected with perfect pleasantness, when the drink had been allowed for; and, besides, it tended on the whole to obscure his credit among his friends rather than otherwise, inasmuch as Sandy was never able to point

to an individual achievement of a satisfactory sort that he could really say was his own ; while his purse remained about as lank as before, and he made no real headway in business. But where there is a sufficiently pronounced will, a distinct way is sure to show itself in due course. And thus it came about that an opportunity for independent trading turned up by and by.

That fell disease, pleuro-pneumonia, visited the region and committed serious ravages among neat stock, to the terror of the farmers and graziers, who had not then the benefit of paternal legislation in the shape of regulations concerning contagious disease amongst animals. In the circumstances a panic ensued. When the disease attacked their stocks they knew that probably three-fourths of them would die if prompt measures were not taken ; and naturally the ordinary run of dealers and butchers fought shy of purchasing diseased beasts, or those that presumably had been in dangerous proximity to them. It was here that Sandy Mutch's talent and spirit of enterprise availed him. He now went boldly into certain speculative cattle transactions, the exact nature and conditions of which he did not openly proclaim ; only he was understood to have embarked somewhat largely in the killing and dead meat business. He certainly forwarded quantities of dead meat to the market, and when his "returns" had come to hand, he paid those from whom he had bought at rates fixed by himself, and which they were bound thankfully to accept.

In course of time cattle disease had disappeared from the locality, but not so Sandy Mutch's resuscitated business. He was again as well in heart as ever, and his familiar form seldom absent from any of the district markets as they occurred. He now bought steadily and in increasing values, often at the close of a market paying down in ready cash to the amount of several hundred pounds.

"He 's an exterordinar chiel', Sandy Mutch ; foo he

has wun to the road again! They tell me he 's better upon 't nor ever," said Bowbutts, who rather loved to gossip a little about his old herd at a time, viewing him as one of the remarkable men of the place.

"An' weel fell 's 'im," replied his neighbour Gowanwall. "It was jist menseless the siller 't he made aff o' diseas't nowte, aw b'lieve."

"Is 't possible, man? Weel, fa wud 'a thocht that fan he was herdin' my beasts, noo?"

"Weel, I 'm nae biddin' ye believe me; but there 's aye some water faur the stirkie droons, ye ken; an' there wus severals that I ken that he ca'd owre beasts till, an' flay't them an' tyeuk them awa' to the Toon o' the seelence o' the nicht in a cairt; an' that didna leuk owre weel."

"An' wud the carkidges raelly been ta'en to the market, no?"

"Weel, I 'm jist tellin' ye fat aw 'm tellin' ye—I wudna wunt to jeedge nae man."

"At ony rate, he 's winnin' in amon' a lot o' the muckle fairmers again."

"Ou ay; fan a chiel' has the siller in 's pouch he 'll hae little diffeekwalty o' gettin' a hearin' an' be thocht a hantle o'. It 's nae lang sin' some o' 's aul' cronies wud 'a hed muckle adee to ken 'im, an' he hedna been pointet oot to them."

"That 's jist the wye o' the wardle, man; but Sawney winna brak 's nicht's rest aboot that, gin the bools be rowin' richt wi' 'im amo' the nowte."

"But fat d' ye think, man?—they tell me that he 's gyaun to tak' a fairm 'imsel', gin he binna deen 't else."

"Gyaun to tak' a fairm! Ye 're seerly jokin' noo, Gowanies."

"Jokin' or no jokin', his bode was neist to the heichest for Mull o' Meadaple the tither day."

"Ex-*ter*-ordinar!"

"Ay; an' it chates me gin he binna gettin' 't tee."

"Weel, that does cowe the gowan fairly!—Sawney

Mutch takin' ane o' the best pairts i' the kwintra-side. Man, there's nae a place like it for girsin' beasts roon an' roon; lat aleen corn an' the green crap."

"An' Sawney didna need 's mither to tell 'im that."

"An' he's raelly ta'en the Mull o' Meadaple. Na, that will be news to our goodwife; she hed aye a kin' o' notion o' the loon, for as droll a breet 's he was."

"Ye see fat it is to hae a freen' i' the coort, mun. There was a perfeck merdle o' them aifter 't; but Sawney hed gotten the banker to pit in a word for 'im wi' the new factor bo'lie—he 's ane o' that Aberdeen lawvyers, ye ken, an' jist kens as muckle about grun' 's my pipe stapple there."

"Ov coorse; but he 'll ken the richt side o' a shillin' brawly, and fat wye to screw 't oot o' fowk, rizzon or neen. There 's fyoo o' them fo's back at that."

"Aw b'lieve ye're aboot richt there, Bowies. 'Well,' says the factor, 'but Maister Mutch is not the highest.' Ov coorse, they hed it alvertees't 'the highest offer may not be accepit.' 'I un'erstan',' says the banker, 'but gif it 's nae pussin' a tempt in nowe, Maister Mutch wad lat's 'imsel' in your han'.' I got this, ye ken, fae them 't hed it for some o' themsel's. So it 's nae cauld aboot clype."

"Let ye the banker aleen. He kens as weel aboot takin' grun' as ony o' them. He's factor't a hantle 'imsel' in 's time, as weel 's a' ither thing."

"O ay; he 's nae a bluie ane, Tammas, we a' ken that."

"So Sawney 's gettin' the Mull noo?"

"Well, I'm teal it 's as gweed 's settl'd. Ov coorse, it was thocht that the factor micht 'a try't gin the t'ither man wad draw up a bit aifter 'im; but he hed behin't yeer hoo readie to 'a sign, it wud appear."

"Very hoo readie, as ye say," observed Bowhouse, somewhat equivocally.

"Nyod, man, it 's marvellous fat eydent 'll dae, especially i' the takin' o' grun'," added Gowanwall.

"In fack, there's nae gettin' o' a pairt worth hae'in hardly wuntin' 't, there's sae mony seekin' them, an sae mony quirks o' ae kin' or anither afore ye can be seer. Hooever, the couper 'll be fairly at the gate wi' the best o' them fan he's in'o Mull o' Meadaple.

CHAPTER VIII.

PLENISHING THE FARM.

The reasons why Sandy Mutch should wish to have a lease of the farm of Mill of Meadaple were too obvious to need lengthened explanation. As the advertisement announcing that it was to let set forth, it was in itself a "desirable possession" for any man with the capacity of the cultivator within him; and then to Sandy Mutch it presented more than average attractions as a basis of operations. Sandy had laboured to persuade his friend, Tammas Rorison, the banker, with whom he was now once more on terms of full confidence, that a main cause of the instability of his previous position lay in the fact that he had no proper local habitation; no sufficient centre of action that could meet and accommodate the outgoings and incomings of such a business as his. And if the banker was not fully persuaded, he at least listened to Sandy's statement; the banker, moreover, knew that at that moment Sandy had on deposit with him a very comfortable balance on the creditor side of his account. How then could he for a moment decline to recommend him as a candidate for the farm he sought? After due consideration the banker decided that he would do it forthwith; and the banker never did things without just and sufficient reasons.

It was not to be thought that the banker's recommendation would go for nothing. Some said Sandy Mutch had taken the farm "at a ransom," and some predicted that his taking it at all was merely the pre-

lude to another failure. Nevertheless, when the period of entry had come, there he was, with an ample stocking of cattle of all sorts, and the needed implements of cultivation accumulating in due abundance.

The farm-house of Mill of Meadaple, it should be known, was of modern construction; not the old-fashioned sort with a thatched roof and the minimum of window space, but a commodious, well-lighted two-storey house, with carefully enclosed and neatly laid out garden in front. Sandy's social estate was that of a bachelor, and his previous domestic surroundings, while living in most part at the humble cottage of his father and mother, had not been of an elaborate sort. In the circumstances, Sandy had thoughts of removing the old people to occupy part of his newly-acquired residence, provided the souter would agree to come, which was by no means certain: for the souter, who still maintained a sort of standing protest against his son's career, had even gone the length of denouncing the leasing of the farm as the act of a man fairly "left to 'imsel'" for no good end.

"No; ye'll do nothing o' the sort," said Tammas Rorison, to whom Sandy had mentioned the subject, on calling to arrange some money transactions connected with his entry to the farm. "They 're owre aul' to tak' reet again though ye hed them transplantit the morn. To tak' yer fader awa' fae his birse't-en's an' 's lapstane, nae to speak o' 's cronies, owrehaulin Kirk an' State, wud be to kill his comfort, an' maybe add little to yours, for he wud never tak' to new haibits an' new company. Hae patience, man; the hoose 'll be worth itsel' to you yet," continued Sandy's sagacious adviser.

"It 's sic a muckle jamb," said Sandy, "an' mair nor the tae half o' 't 'll hae to stan' teem."

"Nae fear o' that; ye maun get the principal rooms made habitable in a decent fashion; an' a fyou raelly gweed things intill 't—a sideboord, for example, for the best parlour."

"Hoot, a side-boord! Is that the name 't the gentles gi'es till a mahogany claise press?"

"No, no; it's a dining-room article."

"Oh, but I've aye ta'en my bit maet i' the kitchie; I wud never hae nae eese for the like o' that," pleaded Sandy.

"Maybe," said the banker; and he added, enigmatically, "but some ither body will, come time; an' a hantle depen's on appearances in maitters o' that kin'. Hae you gotten a gweed hoosekeeper?"

"She 's a vera cawpable servan'."

"Elderly person?"

"N-o; nae passin' foorty or thereaboot."

"Weel, that 'll do. Let *her* keep the ither servan's weel at the staff on'; but tak' ye gweed care yersel', Sandy, lat me tell ye, that ye gi'ena 'er owre muckle heid room aboot the place. D' ye un'erstan'?"

"Weel, but a hoosekeeper maun tak' a gweed hantle o' chairge aboot a fairm."

"Ou ay, ou ay; but hoosekeepers o' forty are sometimes uneo willin' to tak' chairge o' raither mair nor it 's canny to lippen to them, Sandy, man;" and the banker looked straight at Sandy with a waggish air. "However, ye maun lenk out for a hoosekeeper o' anither kin' on yer ain account by an' by."

"Aw dinna ken aboot that," said Sandy Mutch, with a half sheepish look and a decided shake of the head, "a bodie 's as wise to keep their heid oot o' the mink as lang 's they can."

"It depen's a'thegither upo' fat an' fa ye buckle wi', Sandy," replied his astute friend. "Dinna ye think that for a chiel' settin' oot as ye are, a sonsy fairmer's dother wi' a gweed tocher wud be weel worth gettin' a grip o'? Eh?"

Sandy, who had not expected the point to be pressed so closely, and was consequently rather taken aback by the banker's query, stammered out a sort of affirmative reply. The banker was quite in earnest, however, and

he went on to point out to Sandy Mutch that "a wife wi' a tocher" was simply the natural adjunct of a young man in the position he had now attained; not to say the essential factor in a fully satisfactory solution within a reasonable time of the financial and general business problem now before him.

"Ye ken, afore ye pay yer inveetors, an' ae thing wi' anither, ye 'll be workin' upo' paper again for maist pairt; an' if ye 're to keep on your transack amo' beasts it mith be that I could hardly streetch the tether far aneuch for you. Wudna a thoosan' poun' or so come in unco handy, man, sax or nine months aifter this?"

"Weel, aw 'm nae sayin' that it wudna—or aiven the half o' 't for that maitter."

"The half o' 't! Na, na. Ye ken fat wye yer account 'll stan' by the time that yer stockin' an' wark leems are paid for. Na, na; there 's little eese o' fowk throwin' awa' their advantages; ye 've that muckle to learn yet, Sandy, appearandly."

In short, Tammas Rorison had calculated on his *protégé* making a suitable match as a part of the general plan on which he had based his support of him; and he proceeded to give him very practical advice, even condescending on the names of two or three young ladies who he knew very well had the necessary pecuniary qualification; and they were otherwise extremely attractive; so said Tammas.

"Here 's the Maiden o' the Muirton, noo; a strappin' lass wi' a lady's eddication—can play the piano or sing fae the beuk, an mak' 'er menners wi' the best o' yer toon-bred misses—her fader canna turn 'er aff wi' less nor a gweed aucht or nine hunner at onyrate; fat gin she war to come your wye noo?"

What if she were to come his way! Plain, blunt Sandy Mutch, who could buy an ox with anybody, and talk in phraseology entirely appropriate to the occasion, or drink the accompanying dram with a natural and becoming gusto, but whose literary accom-

plishments merely enabled him to sign an accommodation bill occasionally in a rude way, and whose social advantages hitherto had not been such as to permit him to feel perfectly comfortable in drawing-room society of the type that Tammas Rorison had referred to; Sandy was startled into positive uneasiness as he declared his fear that such fine ladies were not the "kin' for him." The banker merely laughed at him in his own jocosely confident way.

"Fat! fairmer o' Mill o' Meadaple, wi' a hoose that hisna its marrow for miles roon aboot; an' nae think 't ye may hae the pick and wile o' the lasses i' the pairt. Oh fie, man!"

"But ye ken the like o' that uppish fowk wudna think me"——

"Tut, tut—ov coorse ye're un'erstood to be weel fit for the place: an' sae ye are," continued the banker, not heeding the interruption further. "An' lat ye that be weel kent, man; get yer hoose pitten in order an' hae some o' yer neebours in aboot come time; only ye mauna mak' yersel' owre cheap; an' for ony sake dinna speak to the women fowk—especially wives wi' dothers o' their han'—as gin ye thocht the best o' them sair worth huntin' aifter. Haud ye up yer heid, man, an' dinna lat them forget that ye 're 'Mill o' Meadaple.' Fan ye come to the point ye winna hae to seek some o' them twice, I can tell ye; tak' ye my word for 't, noo."

These were Tammas Rorison's matured sentiments, and, as Tammas's time was up for the present, Sandy Mutch left him in a somewhat mixed state of mind; his views, it is to be hoped, more or less advanced regarding one particular style of bargain making, but not altogether certain how far his own skill might carry him successfully when the thing came to be attempted in actual practice.

CHAPTER IX.

IT IS RESOLVED TO ENTERTAIN THE COUPER PUBLICLY.

The Whitsunday term had come and gone, the "neep seed" was finished, the jolly well-conditioned farm horses had been turned out to the grass fields to enjoy the time in perfect idleness, night and day—such twilight night as there was, for midsummer was at hand—and a general pause in the activity of farm operations had ensued, when all at once it occurred to the public around Mill of Meadaple that it had become chargeable with something like a positive neglect of duty. No; it was not the mere occurrence of a change of tenant in the place that affected them, and stirred their compunctions. Changes of tenants occurred here and there every year; and when they did occur, it was, no doubt, right and proper for neighbours to bear a neighbourly part, by giving "a lift" at the "flittin'," or such like. But in the present case the matter assumed an aspect of wider importance. It was felt that Mr. Mutch, of Mill of Meadaple, was a man whose career had done some credit to the place of his birth, while his energy and enterprise had been a potent influence in the well-being of the surrounding community. It was right that Mr. Mutch's position and talents should be publicly recognised in some becoming way; and they hastened to decide what the whole circumstances demanded of them to do.

It was at Rob Findlater's inn that the originators of the movement agreed to meet for consultation, and there they mustered over a dozen strong—Muirton,

Bowbutts, Gowanwall, Burnside, and the rest of them. They mustered in the public room, with its sanded floor, its two spittoons, andits deal table, and forms. Then they called for a "half-mutchkin" for the company in general, with three bottles of ale for those who had degenerate tastes, or whose natural thirst could not be appeased by whisky; and then they proceeded to business.

"Weel, men," said Muirton—they had called him to the chair, though Muirton said he had never dreamt of filling that position, and had great diffidence in taking it—"Weel, men, fat wud ye propose? It 's weel kent that Maister Mutch is nae a man to coort the public fawvour by blawin' 's nain horn 's we 've seen some dee wi' a hantle less occasion; but considerin' the buzness that he 's transackit noo for years, an' the owreturn o' money that he 's hed, I 've said all along that I did not think it richt that he sud be latt'n sit doon amon's as a neebour onbeen enterteen't or ta'en some notice o'. Fat say ye, Bowbutts?"

"Weel, I 've kent 'im sin' he was a laddie, an' that 's mair nor some o' ye can say, aw daursay. He was aye a keerious loon; but I can tell ye I did-no think to see 'im fairmer o' Mull o' Meadaple a dizzen o' year syne. I think wi' you, Muirton, that he 's been an eesfu' man i' the pairt, an' deserves to be ta'en notice o'."

"Fat wud ye propose?"

"Aw, weel, aw 'll raither lat some ither ane gi'e 's min' upo' that bit o' 't," said Bowbutts, with becoming modesty; "Burnie mith maybe lat 's hear 'im."

"I 've nae gryte expairience o' naething o' the kin'," said Burnie. "But we ochtna to lat the thing be deen in a shabby menner, ony wye."

The members of the meeting were a little backward in making any definite proposal, though one or two hints were thrown out vaguely about a "supperscription" for a silver-mounted snuff mull, or something of that sort. To this proposal, which was faintly supported

at best, Francie Futtrit, of Dykeside, declared his decided hostility. In Francie's estimation the best way to acknowledge the merits of the man they sought to honour, and give expression to their sentiments of respect and esteem for him would be, when the proper season came round, to make him the beneficiary in a "love darg," in the shape of a ploughing match to be held at Mill of Meadaple; and at which each man should do his part by ploughing a "rig" of lea or stubble land. The idea of the love darg seemed to meet a fair measure of acceptance from the meeting, and promised to lead to some discussion, when the chairman interposed—

"No, no, men; a ploughin' match wud be nae compliment till a man 't 's been sae muckle afore the public; an' forbye, Maister Mutch has stren'th o' men an' beasts to be mair nor maister o' a' the wark upo' the fairm. That'll never dee. Ye maun mak' up yer min's to enterteen 'im."

"Enterteen 'im!" exclaimed Dykeside; "fat gate!"

"Weel, it cudna be less nor a regular public dinner," answered the chairman.

"Hoot-toot, a perfeck throwin' awa' o' siller," said Dykeside; a perfeck throwin' awa' o' siller to nae purpose."

The chairman's proposal seemed to strike some others of the gentlemen as erring on the side of magnificence rather, but after a little discussion it commended itself to the general feeling of the meeting, and Rob Findlater was taken into council to inform them at what cost per head a public dinner could be provided. "Ye ken a'thing would requare to be full an' genteel," added the chairman, to let Rob know distinctly what was wanted. Rob pondered and calculated the thing mentally.

"A'thing—full—an'—genteel," said Rob, scratching his head meditatively. "Weel, it canna be done at less nor half-a-croon."

"An' wud that cover a'?" asked several voices at once.

"Jist the denner, wi' a dram or a drink o' ale a' roun'."

"Lea'in' ilka ane to pay for 's nain drink aifter that?"

"That 's the eeswal wye," answered Rob Findlater.

The meeting thought over it. In so far as the dinner signified eating and drinking, though, no doubt, fresh enough appetites would be there, it was pretty much the case of a pennyworth of bread to an intolerable deal of whisky. And, seeing the half-crown did not include drink in unlimited supply to each guest, the price was thought rather stiff; but as Rob Findlater shook his head decisively at the proposal for a slight reduction somewhat strenuously insisted upon, they contented themselves by a renewed exhortation about fulness and gentility—all but Dykeside, who, beginning at the mere grumbling point, gradually worked himself up to the pitch of being angry, and even somewhat abusive.

"Half-a-croon for a denner! Weel, Rob, man, ye sud mak' a braw penny aff o''t at that rate. Fat? Tell ye faur I cud get a gweed denner for less; 's gin Kirkie didna gie the vera best ilka market day for a shillin', or auchteenpence wi' a half-mutchkin o' punch to three!"

"Foo af'en hae ye denner't wi' Kirkie?" retorted Rob, who knew that Dykeside never by any chance paid for dinner with Kirkie or any one else.

"It mak'sna to you foo af'en I 've denner't wi' Kirkie. It 'll be lang to the day that I 'll pay half-a-croon to you for a diet o' maet -half-a-week's beord to ony man wi' an ordinar stamack! Aw won'er to hear ony ane speak o' sic an extortion."

Here Rob Findlater proceeded to utter certain inuendoes about its being "lucky that some fowk cud get plenty o' lang kail an' peel-an'-aet-potawtoes," when the chairman interposed a little sharply with an observation about the meanness of some people; which

Francie Futtrit did not seem in the least to apply personally. He went on to express his sense of the extravagance of the dinner scheme, repeated his thrust at Rob Findlater, declaring Rob's proposed charge to be a "perfeck intak'," and thereafter abruptly and unceremoniously left the meeting.

"He 's awa an' lat 'im gae," said Burnie. "It 's keerious fat sud gar fowk come here to try an' mak' dispeace. An' he dinna think weel o' the denner, lat 'im bide at hame."

"An' fearna ye but he 'll dee 't, unless ye pay for 'im," said Bowbutts, and the company laughed at Bowbutts's wit.

"An' that 's weel min'et," said Burnie, tugging the bell-rope, "Foo muckle is 't, lassie?" he added, drawing out his long purse as Rob Findlater's waiter appeared.

"Auchteenpence," said the waiter.

"Heely! heely!" was the instant exclamation of half-a-dozen voices, as half-a-dozen other long purses were simultaneously drawn out and untied in friendly competition for the privilege of paying a share of the "lawin." But Burnie insisted on his right to clear the whole score, merely remarking that Dykeside, who had copiously slaked his thirst at the outset, should be reminded that Rob Findlater did not supply drink gratis any more than food.

The next point was to settle who should be chairman at the dinner. By universal suffrage, Muirton was at once chosen to the office; but Muirton not only demurred, he emphatically protested against the proposal. It was not simply his lack of qualification for the office —that *might* be got over—but the very notion of overlooking Tammas Rorison, the banker, was too monstrous to be entertained, and Muirton would not entertain it. On reflection, the meeting admitted that there was force in Muirton's view. It had not occurred to them; but the banker was undoubtedly a most important figure in the community; he would be so well "up to"

the whole business of chairmanship, too; and then there would be a feeling of fresh and pleasurable novelty to some of them in being brought in contact with him in a way so strongly human, and so essentially different from that to which they were accustomed in the banker's private room. It was unanimously agreed that the banker should be asked to be chairman; and that point being amicably settled, Muirton, with the modest remark that, "Failin' a better, he mith tak' the boddom o' the table," allowed himself to be nominated croupier.

CHAPTER X.

THE COUPER IS PUBLICLY ENTERTAINED.

A VERY natural expectation on the reader's part would be that I should now go on to describe with what vividness I could the entertainment to Mr. Mutch of Mill of Meadaple; the style in which the dinner was served, and the eloquent speeches delivered thereat; the songs that were "interspersed," and the hilarity and harmony that prevailed.—All this, with the enthusiastic reception accorded to "the guest of the evening," and the vociferous "three times three and one cheer more" that capped the climax when the chairman called for a special bumper, and asked them to drain it "to the health of our respected friend and neighbour, in whose honour we are assembled here to-night." I might have endeavoured to do it, for have not I, too, witnessed it all; have not I warmed up at the lusty "Hip—hip—hooray!" and the equally lusty strains of "He's a right good fel—low!" and been touched with sympathetic emotion when "the guest of the evening" rose under "evident deep feeling," and "amid renewed applause," to acknowledge the "unmerited honour"? Have not I witnessed all this under the friendly shelter of Rob Findlater's canvas tent, transformed for the nonce into "a spacious and elegant marquee," if one might accept the terminology of the local newspapers? But, questions of artistic propriety apart, one does feel that without the actual fumes of the toddy, and the living presence of the glowing bucolic faces, it is but a poor picture that mere words

can present to those who have not been privileged to participate in the reality. To those who have been so privileged, the memory of the thing ought for ever thereafter to be sufficiently green.

Let me be excused then when I simply say that the dinner came off with abundant *éclat*. Rob Findlater outdid himself, even, as purveyor; and the company did full "justice" to Rob and his viands. And after all, they had Muirton in the chair. He was a pawky carle Tammas Rorison the banker. Whether he would be chairman, and why ultimately he did not fill that office, were never at any point clearly understood by the testimonialists. Excepting Muirton, who had no doubt an inkling beforehand of how the case would be, the company were perplexed, and even exhibited some tendency to depression of spirits; but the banker put them all in high feather by the appropriate jocularity of his letter of apology duly read from the chair. They had Bowbutts for croupier, and though that worthy agriculturist was perhaps a little deficient in points of etiquette belonging to his function, as the dinner proceeded his abundant and growing *bonhomie* formed a pleasing relief to the somewhat stately manner which the chairman felt it incumbent on him to maintain throughout. When the important part of the evening's business was over, and Sandy Mutch, in reply to the toast of his health, had delivered himself, as he best could, of the sentiments that possessed his soul, they took up a formidable string of toasts concerning "Landed Proprietors," "Tenant Farmers," the "Agricultural Interest," "Manure Merchants," and so on, somewhat severely taxing the speaking power of the assembled company in proposing and responding. But when men are in the right vein, it is wonderful what can be done. And that those met to do honour to Sandy Mutch were so needs no better proof than the fact that though the farmer of Dykeside, Francie Futtrit, had stuck to his mean threat of declining to

pay half-a-crown for a dinner ticket, Dykeside's brother, Willie, the coo-couper, of whom we have ere now heard, was there to reply to the toast of "The Cattle Trade;" and moreover, with an eloquence that few men present could have surpassed, even at that stage of the proceedings, to utter his eulogium on the guest of the evening, as a man worthy of their highest esteem and regard—"I've kent 'im for mony a year an' day better nor ony man i' the company, as may weel appear," said Willie Futtrit, "for we're baith i' the same line o' buzness. He begood lang aifter me; an' he's risen—he's risen noo as ye a' ken; an' aw will say that fyou in oor line's better deservin'. We've hed oor bits o' tifts—fa is't in buzness 't hisna hed their bits o' tifts?—but for a' that—Sawney Mutch, ye're an honest chiel', man: an' aw'll tak' yer han' in mine as lief's mony o' my best freen's.—Fair fa' ye, Sawney, man."

Willie Futtrit had "warsl't" up the side of the table a long way from his original position, the intervening space having got thinned by the disappearance of several of the guests. As he uttered the last sentence he suited the action to the word "amid the loud cheers" of his audience, excepting, perhaps, the chairman, who appeared to regard this highly amicable proceeding with unaccountable severity. As the old couper's demonstrativeness did not seem likely to abate, he checked it by calling for the toast o' "The Ladies," which, of course, had to be replied to by the oldest bachelor of the company.

By and by they had reached the end of the toast list; next they entered upon a miscellaneous series of extemporised additions thereto; and these being ended, Rob Findlater, whose services were deemed worthy of very loud praise, as indeed they received it on the spot, had to reply to the toast of "The Host and Hostess."

And then in due time the party broke up, much pleased with themselves and with the whole ongoings of the dinner.

CHAPTER XI.

THE TENANT OF MILL OF MEADAPLE.

Mr. Mutch, farmer and cattle dealer, Mill of Meadaple, was now a man of the reasonably mature age of thirty-four; a man in his full prime, in short. Of his status and position, socially and financially, none in his circle could or did entertain a doubt. In his personal aspect, too, he had certain advantages not by any means to be despised among a people with whom the tangible and visibly appreciable are apt to make a deeper impression than the merely ideal or spiritual. His figure—physically as well as mentally, Sandy, as has been already hinted, took after his mother rather than after his father—was distinguished quite as much by fleshy bulkiness, as by symmetry of form. His cheeks, which constituted the main part of the area of a rather good-natured face, were large, though not very bountifully whiskered, his hands also looked large, and still more so his feet; and he walked with a ponderous rather than elastic swing. His perpendicular height touched six feet; he had latterly reached the weight of full fourteen stone; and altogether Mill of Meadaple gave the general onlooker the idea of a man with a very substantial presence.

It was impossible to doubt that, in his chosen line, a man of Sandy's cut and calibre must succeed. And then the public dinner: who could blame Sandy Mutch if he began at length to entertain a somewhat more definite idea of his own importance? Sandy found himself the object of more profuse attentions from

neighbouring farmers and their wives than ever before; and he had no end of invitations to private entertainments, conducted in the style of laboured hospitality that was common to the region. No wonder if it should come to pass that, during a winter season with a good deal of this sort of social dissipation in it, Sandy Mutch, as a not altogether inapt pupil of his friend Tammas Rorison, the banker, should actually begin, though in rather a deliberate way, to mature his ideas somewhat on the subject of matrimony as an actual event in his own future. Excessive susceptibility to the tender passion did not seem to be Sandy's besetting weakness; at anyrate, tenderness of sentiment in the matter did not overbear his other feelings. Yet, now that he had been brought a little more closely in contact with the set of charming and accomplished young ladies to whom his attention had been previously directed, he would have been more than mortal if he could have retained an attitude of entire indifference toward those charms and accomplishments. But it was needful to discriminate, and Sandy Mutch did not doubt his own capacity in that way. The banker had put him in possession of valuable elements in the case, and it would be his own fault if he failed to turn these to the right use. Only he would not consent to be helplessly in leading strings to the banker nor to any one else. "The Maiden o' the Muirton" he knew to be worth "a gweed aucht hunner;" and one or two others there were whom he had heard estimated at even a higher rate. The question was how to balance cash against capability of management as mistress of the farm house, so as to strike an absolute value by which one could be fairly compared with another. Questions of personal attraction had, no doubt, to be considered, and allowed for, but the scales must be somewhat nearly balanced before these could be permitted to turn the beam to one side or the other.

In thus finding himself the object of so much atten-

tion among pleasant young ladies, and still more among their expansive and affectionate mothers, Sandy Mutch, in sober truth, was in no little danger of being spoilt, and had, I think, actually begun to get a little light-headed. He had penetration enough to see that apart from his own personal attractions, those belongings of his, in the shape of a fine farm and handsome residence, were the means of exciting the extremely favourable regards of the matron part of his acquaintance ; and, by a not very intricate process of reasoning, he had arrived at the notion that what was so attractive to the mothers, would not be altogether matter of indifference to the daughters. As for the male part of the community, it was well known that the prevalent sentiment regarding matrimonial engagements was purely utilitarian. They did not talk about a young man or a young woman making a suitable match. What they said was "a gweed bargain ;" and that, on the part of either man or woman, directly implied the acquisition of money or its equivalent in the transaction.

That this view of holy matrimony had been formally pressed upon Sandy Mutch we already know ; that it had found acceptance, and was growing in favour with him, there seemed every reason to believe. Yet somehow Sandy appeared to be in no such urgent haste to marry, as might in the circumstances have been expected. A whole year and more had elapsed, and though he was spoken of in a general way as the sweetheart of several young ladies—and in the case of the Maiden of the Muirton, there were colourable grounds for saying that he had paid greater attentions than Platonic friendship would justify—still matters remained in *statu quo*, as it concerned the domesticities of Mill of Meadaple ; and Sandy was still a bachelor.

"Weary set that chiel'," said Tammas Rorison, the banker, "he has seerly nae taste ava ; an' sae mony bonny, weel-tocher't lasses i' the pairt jist in aweers o' bein' o' the gimmer hillock." But the banker had even

gone the length of remonstrating more seriously with his client, reminding him that his account was now in a state that gave him ground to press the point. Sandy, in an entirely easy and jocular tone, said, "Ou, we'll maybe get accommodation owre the road!" He meant at the rival bank; but jocular as the remark was, the banker did not half like it, and distinctly indicated a disposition to be sharp. Sandy took the matter with much equanimity, however; and was understood to have thereafter uttered the remark, that the banker "mith jist kweel i' the skin that he het in," a somewhat rash speech on his part it might be.

Matters had gone on in this way for a while, but at last something like a crisis came. Dame Rumour had set more definite reports than hitherto afloat; and it was thus that Bowbutts and his neighbour Burnside discussed the matter:—

"They say Mull o' Meadaple is to be marriet at the lang len'th," observed Bowbutts.

"Ou yea! Weel Muirton an' the goodwife hae wrocht sair for't, ye maun alloo, lat aleen the Miss 'ersel'," replied Burnside.

"But aw'm nae vera seer, man, 't it's nae a' up in that quarter," said Bowbutts.

"Hoot, fye! It's been thocht to be as gweed's sattl't 't he was takin' the maiden," exclaimed Bowbutts's friend with some surprise.

"Weel, aw dinna doot but there mith 'a been something o' 't. But Gowanies an' some o' them hed been ha'ein' a hyse wi' 'im the tither nicht aifter the market, fan Sawney was a wee thochtie sprung, an' Gowanies was tellin' me that he hed bann't at Muirton like a' thing fan they ca'd 'im 's gweedfader; an' taul' them that he kent faur to get a wife wuntin' Muirton or ony ither ane."

"Ay, ay, man. But aifter'n a' the lassie 's seerly gweed aneuch a' wye for him, though he be a muckle man noo-a-days."

"Lickly. Still an' on, Muirton has a big faimily, ye ken. He canna hae a byous soom to gie 'er for a tocher."

"True; but for a' that, man—Muirton has gryte enfluence amo' the muckle fowk."

"Ou ay, there's his twa sins that he's pitten in'o gweed places; but the moggan maun hae been geylies socht afore he gat them set doon faur they are."

"Ay, but the aul'est ane 's marriet, ye ken, an' gat an' oudeemas thing o' siller wi''s wife; an' the tither ane, they tell me, 's to be a bridegreem immedantly, wi' a dother o' aul' Peter Lipp o' Backfaul', Muirton's nain cousin."

"Hoot, fye! Weel, man, it 's exterordinar' foo they've marriet throu' ither that fowk—cousins an' secon't cousins—aye keepin' the clossach thegither fan they cud."

"Oh, they've been a grippie, wily set, for mony a year an' day, an' Muirton brak's naething aff fae the best o' them. Man, gin he cud 'a gotten Mull o' Meadaple, wi' fat himsel' and the sins thegither hae, they wud 'a hed a haill kwintra side amo' them."

"Weel; but it seems Sawney Mutch is nae takin' the maiden. They say there 's some ither ane o' the go wi' 'im worth about a thoosan' at onyrate—so Gowanies an' them was tellin' me," said Bowbutts.

"Sang, I dinna ken; aw 'm jist raither dootin' Sawney 's latt'n Muirton get the eemost grip wi' 'im. He 'll better tak' care o' 'imsel'," answered Burnside thoughtfully.

"Fat wye, man?"

"Weel, ye see, Muirton 's been owre at the Mull toon ilka ither day for raiths past. I've seen 'im wi' my nain een; haikin' throu' the feedles the tae time, an' in'o the byres the neist, 's gin a' thing aboot the toon war 's nain."

"My certy, gin that be the gate o' 't, Sawney 'll better ca' canny

"Ay wull he. It wudna be for pure love an' freen'-ship to him 't a' that wud be gaen on. An' gin he try to play protticks wi' Muirton, he 'll maybe grip him as ticht 's vera mony."

Evidently, if the under-current of gossip should turn out to have its origin in reliable matter of fact, Sandy Mutch was getting into somewhat critical circumstances.

CHAPTER XII.

THE COUPER'S WOOING.

That Sandy Mutch was about to get married seemed at last to have become a matter of something like absolute certainty. The symptoms were hardly to be mistaken, and, in fact, gave birth to any amount of pleasant gossip all over the region where Sandy was so well known. Who the fortunate lady of his choice was to be was still a matter of some doubt, to be sure; but for purposes of gossip this was not by any means a disadvantage. Not fewer than four or five farmers' daughters had been more or less confidently assigned to our hero. Yet the only distinct evidence available on the precise point in hand was of a negative kind. Two, at least, of the young ladies who had been spoken of were known to have given utterance to emphatic and somewhat bitter declarations to the effect that they "wud see 'im far aneuch ere they wud hae 'im; muckle, vulgar, couper slype." It was very clear that none of these entertained the faintest hope of becoming Mrs. Mutch, the goodwife of Mill of Meadaple. Two or three had not spoken out, however, or had spoken only in terms capable of a double construction; and among these latter was the Maiden of the Muirton, and a lady not hitherto mentioned in this chronicle—Jean, elder daughter of Francie Futtrit, farmer of Dykeside. The status and position of the maiden have been so far indicated; the maiden herself was a young lady of twenty-seven, who had got all the advantages, educationally, that a very respectable boarding school in the

county town could give her. She was well bred when occasion required, and even laboriously polite. A stout blonde, with abundance of colour in her cheeks, and who had in good measure the family characteristics of carefulness and politic caution, rather than anything in the nature of impulsiveness or too easy confidence. Miss Futtrit was several years the maiden's senior—so, at least, it was said; nobody would have dogmatised on the point—and in the matter of social status she could not by any means cope with the maiden. Most certainly Muirton and his wife would have scorned to invite Dykeside and his daughter to one of the premier parties held at their house, and to which the chief residents in the parish were invited. Sandy Mutch could not but be aware of this. But Dykeside's family (he was a widower) consisted of no more than two daughters; and as Dykeside had amassed very industriously for a lifetime, and been also fortunate enough to come in as heir to several relatives of like habits, it was certain that each of his daughters would have a very handsome "tocher." The "thousan' poun'" spoken of was probably not an over-estimate, and it exceeded the tocher assigned to the Maiden of the Muirton. Miss Futtrit had not had the advantage of a finished education, yet was she reputed to be a good housewife. An industrious person, and thrifty in the last degree, in harmonious accord with the example set by her father; and, as her position in the household had practically been that of mistress for several years, there had been good scope for the exercise of these virtues. Though slightly diminutive in person, and not so erect in figure as she might have been—probably an effect of her plodding on so diligently at the daily drudgery of the farm house—these were hardly appreciable drawbacks. And if her complexion lost something on the side of sallowness, by comparison with the maiden's, had not Sandy Mutch, on the other hand, heard her defined by competent critics of

the milder type as "a settin' deemie, an' a feerious eident creatur'."

Now, there could be no doubt of the fact that, in contemplating the subject of matrimony, Sandy Mutch had thought of the Maiden of the Muirton—thought of her over and over again. Perhaps he had spoken to her in what the maiden accepted as the language of courtship; perhaps Sandy had at times meant his words to have a bias that way; perhaps he had not calculated their precise drift always, for I don't think he was skilful in the matter of uttering tender somethings or nothings. Certainly, in his later intercourse with Miss Futtrit, however—or at any rate with her father—he had thrown a kind of business earnestness into the proceedings. In purchasing a pair of fat stots from Dykeside, when the old man was in high good humour, at the long price—"saxty poun', an' them only aff twa year auld"—Sandy took the opportunity of observing—

"Ye 'll mak' a perfeck bing o' siller this sizzon wi' sic prices."

"Na, na; it 's the like o' you 't can turn a penny fan beasts grows daar—I 've deen better mony a year," said Dykeside.

"Ye 'll sell anither half a dizzen i' the coorse o' the winter?"

"A' that at ony rate; an' maybe a pair o' foreigners to haud it haill wi'. But that's twa wauchty beasts o' their age, min' ye."

Sandy Mutch pondered on Dykeside's reply for a minute. He knew his rent, which was small indeed, relatively to such an "out-turn" of cattle. It seemed certain then that Dykeside must be making money fast; yet he said he had done even better formerly. Sandy remembered that Dykeside's family consisted of two daughters; and, after a pause, he suddenly exclaimed,

"Aw 'm sayin', Dykies, your Jean wud be a capital wife to me!"

"Hoot, Mully; ye 're aye haverin' aboot something," was Dykeside's reply.

"Aw'm nae jokin', though, eenoo," said Sandy seriously.

"Weel, weel, man, ye sud ken best; an' foo mony mair hae ye socht?"

"Aw'm tellin' ye the Gweed's trowth, Dykies. As sure's deith, aw wud like Jean at the term!"

"Hoot, hoot; I canna spare Jean, eenoo, at ony rate."

"But ye ken I *am* to be marriet; an' ye 'll hae to spare 'er, in coorse!"

"Weel," answered Dykeside reflectively, "but I can-not spare 'er at Whitsunday ony wye, It 's nonsense to speak aboot it—aw canna dee wuntin 'er.

"But I 'm nae sae deen hurriet wi' 't gin 't war to pit you aboot," continued Sandy; "we cud wyte a fyou months."

"Gin she be willin' ye mith get 'er aboot Mairtimas. Ye can speer at 'er. Jean has a min' o' 'er nain; an' I sanna mak' nor meddle far'er wi' 't," said Dykeside, who, like other people, was by no means insensible to the attractions offered by a man occupying such an eligible position as that of Sandy Mutch.

Upon this "precunnance" matters stood; and as murder will out, the report had by and by assumed quite a definite form and become known to nearly everybody who cared to take the least interest in it.

It was not at all odd that among the very last to get the authentic report in any articulate form were the family of the Muirton. People rather suspected the news might excite a little soreness of feeling in that quarter; and thus they were wary enough to keep off the subject, aye and until a certain matron of the place, who at suitable times was privileged to pour her confidences into the ear of the goodwife of the Muirton, could carry the burden no longer, and with a due sense of the responsibility of further reticence, delivered there the intelligence that—"The man o' Mull o' Meadaple's takin' the deemie Futtrit; Dykie's dother; peer,

warsh, blinterin thing; but fat is't that fowk winna dee for siller? Na, na; it's nae ca'd aboot clype nor teethless said-sae; they're to be marriet i' the tail o' hairst, aw b'leive."

The goodwife of the Muirton was a prudent woman, and she maintained her composure wonderfully in presence of her visitor. But on that same evening it was obscurely understood that the maiden had been in a state of rather pronounced excitement, partly through vexation, and partly from the state of high indignation to which her feelings had risen at the thought of Sandy Mutch's very treacherous behaviour to herself, for the facts had been stated with a circumstantiality and minuteness that left no doubt of their substantial truth. "Amen's" of Sandy was the resource that had occurred to her mother and herself, and which they had looked at in various forms, including that of the ordinary legal procedure against him, before Muirton himself returned from a market at which he had been absent. This remedy of law they hastened to press on the attention of Muirton at once, as soon as he had been informed of the facts of the case.

"Weesht, weesht," exclaimed that shrewd agriculturist, "dinna speak nonsense; ye hinna a scraip o' 's vreet o' nae kin-kin' though 't war naething ither."

"But fa cud expeck to hae 's vreet?" exclaimed the goodwife of the Muirton in an excited key. "He 's nae ane that ever was gryte shot at the pen. Hooever, fan it comes to that, I 'se be a witness mysel', an' maybe tell fat 'll gar 'im leuk as blate 's ony vreet cud dee—slung that he is!"

"A mith 'a expeckit something o' this kin'," continued Muirton in a soliloquising tone. "He 's been keepin' sae weel oot o' my road this file. But they gae far aboot 't never meets—Na, I sawna 'im i' the market."

"Wasna he there?"

"Of coorse he was there."

"Weel, man, ye 'll jist tak' advice upon 't at ance;

ye 're nae to lat 'im throu' yer fingers like a k-notless thread," pursued the goodwife.

To this appeal Muirton replied none otherwise than by a gesture indicative of impatience. He exhorted, almost commanded, his wife and daughter to discard sentimental exhibitions, and maintain a resolute silence on the subject. What more was to happen Muirton indicated not by word or look, albeit his whole bearing was that of a man, who if he had not already matured a plan, had at least in his head the elements of one that was likely to take definite form, and be put decisively in force without much loss of time.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE COUPER "BEUKET."

NEXT morning, Muirton was stirring about betimes. He despatched the business that lay to his hand in the way of issuing orders through his grieve to guide the work of the farm for the day. Then he went to breakfast, and, by the time he had finished, his gig was at the door waiting him.

It was to the burgh Muirton wished to drive. What his thoughts were by the way it would not be easy to divine, for Muirton was a man who could well keep his counsel to himself when occasion required. That Sandy Mutch occupied some part of them it was reasonable to believe; and that the farm of Mill of Meadaple occupied fully as large a part was no less credible. In the course of certain recent perambulations which he had got into the habit of making about that place, as we have already learned, it was undeniable that Muirton's affection for Mill of Meadaple had warmed up strongly. As he jogged along in the gig the road took him round directly below the finest fields on the farm. A weaker man might have felt it hard to resist the impulse to drive up to the farm house and tackle the farmer at once. Muirton merely twisted himself half-way round in the gig at the point where the best view of Mill of Meadaple house and farm was to be had, took a deliberate survey, and resuming his proper attitude, as he stimulated his nag to a smarter pace, muttered, "It 'll rin hard wi' him an' me tee ere I lose the grip o' 't."

When he had reached the burgh, Muirton made his way first and specially to the office of Sandy Mutch's banker, Tammas Rorison. The banker and Muirton were friends of long standing; and in the particular circumstances of the case, Muirton naturally wished to consult the banker. He told Tammas this in the fullest confidence; whether he told or desired to tell him his whole mind on the subject is another matter. It was scarcely right or fair, perhaps, to trouble the banker; but Muirton understood that he had largely befriended the young man; had indeed been the means of his occupying the specially-favoured position he did, and therefore Muirton, with great reluctance, had come to the conclusion that it was right the banker should know the exact position of affairs as between Sandy Mutch and his, Muirton's, daughter. He was very sorry—knowing the interest the banker had taken in Sandy Mutch, he regretted it exceedingly. And, therefore, though paternal duty laid its own stern demands upon him—though the case was altogether a very aggravated one, and the farmer of Mill of Meadaple completely open to very serious consequences pecuniarily—Muirton, so he said, was quite disposed to have the matter settled quietly, on terms which should be as little damaging to the offending party as the strict requirements of justice would admit of. This, in the simplicity of his heart, he desired to confide to the banker as a very particular and valued personal friend. And, coming to the point at once, he had merely to say that, though he could not accept of a farthing less than eight hundred pounds—not a farthing—(if the law were preferred, double that amount must be demanded at the very least)—he was willing to take five hundred pounds cash down, and Mutch's bill for the balance at six months' date, as it might be inconvenient for him to pay over the whole amount at once.

Tammas Rorison listened to Muirton's recital in a state of mind largely compounded of anger and surprise,

yet all the while concentrating his attention in a reasonable degree upon Muirton's diplomatic way of putting the case.

"The mortal idiot!" said the banker. "Fa ever heard o' the like? Francie Futtrit's dother goodwife o' the brawest hoose i' the haill pairis'; a creatur that never was a score o' miles fae hame in 'er lifetime; an' kens o' naething but grubbin' awa' at a' kin' o' ploiterie wark, oot an' in, wi' tacketie sheen as grey 's the tod on 'er feet, an' her han's like the vera horn!"

"It wud appear that that 's the man's choice, siclike as it is," said Muirton, with a well-assumed air of indifference. "Hooever!"

"Jean Futtrit in a drawin'-room wi' a Brussels carpet on't? Peer woman; she 's muckle liker her nain sett wi' the yird fleer aneth 'er feet an' the timmer bauks abeen 'er heid."

"Weel, ye see, I thocht it richt to let you ken afore I gaed forder a-len'th, kennin' 'im to be a particular customer wi' you. The man 'll nae doot get a triffle; but it mith like aneuch blaud 's credit sae far, fan 't war't kent that he hed a big soom to pay to oor lassie, owre an' abeen payin' the lawvyers." And as Muirton spoke he kept quietly watching the effect of his words on the banker.

"An' I 've nae doot she 'll suffer a muckle main disappointment forbye," said that worthy, with an equivocal twinkle. "She wud be sair smitten wi' 'im, aw'm weel seer?"

"Ou, weel," replied Muirton, in a more business-like tone, "it 's naitral to think that the like o' oor Nancy wud be better confeerin to ane in a toon like you, nor a creatur 't 's never seen ocht nor flee ootwith a stob-thackit hoose, wi' a but an' a ben, though her fader be weel aneuch upon 't."

"Nae doot; only Dykeside 'll keep a gweed aneuch grip o' ilka saxpence that he has till he ken fat for; or it cheats me. So it wudna be muckle to be won'er't at

though Sandy mith fin' 'imsel' in a ticht aneuch nyeuk to turn in."

"Ou weel, there 's nae ane can blame me for grippin' 'im in aboot at this time."

"'Deed no, Muirton ; an' we hed 'im here we sud gi'e 'im a grip that he wud fin' till 's finger points maybe."

"Will ye be seein' 'im shortly likein?" asked Muirton.

"See 'im or no see 'im," said Tammas Rorison, "I 'se gi'e 'im three lines o' my min' this vera nicht.—Rest yer shanks twa minutes there."

The banker went to his desk and set resolutely to writing, jerking his spectacles up to the top of his forehead as he began. When he had finished he dabbed the written side of the sheet on his blotting pad, and after scanning the page, handed it to Muirton for his perusal.

"Um-hum," said Muirton in a deliberate tone handing the letter back to be folded.

"Ye mith dee waur, man, nor tak' the bit missive i' yer han'," observed the banker as he finished that operation.

To the banker's proposal Muirton made some slight demur. It was like asking him to stoop so low as seek the presence of a man upon whom he had made up his mind to operate through a third party in the person of his legal agent. But Tammas knew better.

"Na, na, Muirton," said he—

"The law 's a draw-wall unco deep,
Withoot a rim fowk oot to keep ;
But ance ye 're in
Ye 'll fin' the gate baith stey an' steep
Ere oot ye win.

But ye 're nae sae bauch hertit, man. Tak' ye that till 'im, an' ye 'll ken foo to dee aifterhin yersel'. There 's naething like takin' a handy grip, an' syne ca' the nail to the heid fan ye hae the chance."

Muirton took the banker's letter without further ado, simply observing, "I ken aw can lippen to you ; bat ye 'll need to pit in a back chap gin 't be necessar."

"Fear na ye, man," said the banker. "My compliments to the goodwife; an' tell ye Nancy that an' 't warna that weary rheumatics I wud be practeesin' my steps for 'er waddin', for a' this bit caper o' Sandy's."

Ah! Sandy Mutch; little dost thou know what has been brewing for thee! Whilst thou hast been resting thy loving thoughts on the charms of Jean Futtrit of Dykeside, and hast even ridden a couple of miles out of thy way to do somewhat in furtherance of thy suit so auspiciously begun with Dykeside for possession of the person of his daughter, two men a good deal more astute than thyself have been coolly framing a method to upset thy purpose. And now, as thou approachest Mill of Meadaple, on thy homeward way, who should be facing thee at thine own door, with countenance bespeaking unmistakable resolution, but the goodman of the Muirton—the very man of all others thou wert least desirous to see!

The time for circuitous operations was clearly at an end. And it was of no use attempting evasion of the inevitable. Before Muirton had uttered a single word, Sandy Mutch instinctively felt that the cool, long-headed senior was "too many" for him; and when Muirton, after a curt salutation, and the remark that he would require a few words with him in a quiet way, pulled out Tammas Rorison's missive, and bade him "read that!" Sandy saw that the case was as good as "up" for him. He painfully spelt over the banker's letter, which was in entire accordance with that gentleman's spoken sentiments, and, moreover, contained a very plain hint in few words, that to prefer Miss Futtrit to the Maiden of the Muirton would simply be equivalent to a prompt stoppage of his credit under circumstances the most disadvantageous to him; let alone the special vengeance of Muirton and Muirton's daughter, which he must face as he best could. Sandy Mutch was not aware that the drift of the letter had been made fully known to Muirton by its writer, and

he endeavoured in a vague and clumsy way to fence with Muirton, when asked point blank to give an explicit statement concerning his matrimonial intentions. He even went the length, when closely pressed, of averring that there was "naething mair atween him an' Jean Futtrit than there mith be atween him an' ither half-a-dizzen."

"Sae muckle the better for ye, Sandy, man; gin that be the gate o' 't ye 'll mak' nae words to gae owre bye to the dominie wi' me at ance till we get your intentions pitten in black an' fite."

"Nae to be beuket wi' your Nancy?" exclaimed Sandy in wondering tones.

"An' fat for no?"

"Aw cudna dee that ony wye.—Nae the nicht!"

"Jist please yersel', than," said Muirton drily. "Ye ken baith the tae side o' the stank an' the tither noo—tak' yer choice."

"But ye wudna hae me to gae there eenoo, seerly? I haena spoken to Nancy hersel'," pleaded Sandy.

"Ye 'll speak neen the waur to Nancy fan we 've that pint sattl't," replied the inexorable Muirton. "Ye seerly forget that I 'm 'er fader; an' fat kin' o' eesage ye 've been gi'ein' me an' my faimily. I thocht Maister Borison hed taul' ye plain aneuch to fesh ye to yer senses; but gin ye winna hear rizzon fae him nor me, ye can jist mak' up yer min' to pay me doon that aucht hunner poun'; or say 't ye winna dee 't, an' I 'll ken fat wye to turn the kinkin pin upo' ye at ance."

To attempt further resistance was of no use. Sandy Mutch scratched his head, looked apoplectic, smote his hand on his thigh with something like a muttered oath and—succumbed to his destiny. That very evening his ruthless mentor and he sought the presence of the dominie in company; and that functionary in his capacity of session clerk, with sundry remarks of a gratulatory and humorous sort, over which he got into

a state of effusive geniality, "booked" the declared wish of Alexander Mutch, farmer, Mill of Meadaple, to have duly proclaimed in the parish church for the first time on the forthcoming Sabbath day, that he had formed a purpose of marriage with Agnes, daughter of Adam Ironside, farmer in Muirton of Inverdeen.

On the same evening when bank hours were past, and Tammas Rorison had betaken himself to his easy-chair and his newspaper, Tammas's wife, who sat with her feet on the fender and darned her husband's stockings, resumed a conversation which had been interrupted shortly before, in these words :—

"But fat need hed ye to interfere ava, man ; mithna he be as weel wi' the ane as the ither ?"

"Ye 're jist like a' yer kin', 'oman," said Tammas, over the top of his paper ; "sair exercees't aboot sma' points, fan a maitter o' matrimony comes o' the carpet."

"Weel, I think the lass o' Dykeside 's perfectly suitable for ony vulgar chiel like Sandy Mutch ; an' if it be siller, they say she has mair nor Miss Ironside."

"An' ye think Sandy ocht to tak' 'er ?"

"Weel I think it 's real ill usage to the lass if he dinna aifter he 's gane so far."

Tammas Rorison was reading some passage that interested him at the moment ; he was silent for a little, and then allowing the paper to drop on his knee, he remarked—

"Ye think the deemie Futtrit 's gettin' ill usage ?"

"Deed I dee so, man."

"Weel, 'oman," said Tammas, "that 's jist fat I wud expect. It wud be a queer wardle an' women fowk hed leave to rowle a' thing their ain wye. There wud be fyou unmairriet men, or aiven laddies oot o' their short jackets, for ae thing. An' mony a sad pirn wud there be ere ye gat them a' splic't on the principle o' pure love an' affection."

"Hoot, man, fa 's speakin' o' love an' affection ; it 's only fa has maist bawbees for that maitter."

"There ye go," exclaimed Tammas. "Aye at extremes; but that winna dee either—it 's nae a mere question o' fa has maist bawbees."

"Fat is 't, than? Siller 's a principal pairt; an' the lass has the biggest tocher o' the twa. An' for the lave o' 't she 's gi'en proof that she 's a capable manager."

"An' the Maiden o' the Muirton hisna; jist so," said Tammas who had now got into an erect position and stood with his back to the fire in his favourite attitude. "Weel, aboot 'er siller. Francie Futtrit keeps his Accoont at the office owre the road, ye ken. An' fat syne—I 'm nae dootin 't he may be worth a' 't they say—but do ye think it likely 't my neebour wud encourage Francie to tak' up ilka penny o' the deemie's tocher an' han' 't owre to Sandy Mutch as seen as ever the twa war made ae flesh; supposin' aye that the creatur war dispos't to dee onything o' the sort; an' that 's makin' a wide supposition? Nae till he kent fat for; an' foo far it mith be possible to grip Tammas Rorison intill a corner. An' pittin' the maitter at fat ye may ca' its braidest—Supposin' Sandy war transferr't, stock, lock, an' barrel, to the custody o' oor neebour an' Francie Futtrit. Do ye mean to tell me that that wud be onything short o' ruinous to the lad—to be at the mercioment o' twa creaturs like them; a dry't up whingein' bodie 't 's kittle aneuch it may be amo' bills an' bank credits, but awa fae the office dask hisna the smeddum o' a new spean't calf; an' a nabal earthworm like Dykeside? Na; na, 'oman. They hae neither sense nor mense to hae in their han's in ony sic menner. They wud ca' 'im to the gowff in a towmon's time."

"Hoot, fye man," said Mrs. Rorison; "ye 're forgettin' that he 's weel able to tak' care o' 'imsel'."

"I 'm forgettin' nae pairt o' the concern," answered Tammas. "The prime an' only notable faculty o' Sandy Mutch is that he can buy nowte. Gweed kens fat wye the gift 's come to him, as it 's come to mony anither thick skull't breet. Only it 's there; an' he 'll

haud 's ain wi' men that cairry three times his brains, as far as rinnin' owre the quality, wecht, an' vailue o' a fat ox is concern't. But though ye hae the couper faculty there, the business is to keep it gaen safely for 'imsel' an' ither fowk—to gi'e rope aneuch an' nae owre muckle, an' rin 'im up ticht at the dykeside fan needs be, 's we 've jist been tryin' to dee. Noo, I flatter mysel' 't I 've ta'en aboot as muckle oot o' 'im first an' last as maist men wud hae deen; an' made a braw man o' 'im wi' 't a'. An' fan' it 's come to this point wi' 't, I wud surely be mair nor unfaithfu' to my chairge to lose a' interest in 'im, an' disobleege a gweed customer forbye."

"Weel, they 're a bonnie pair, Muirton an' him—I kenna which is warst; but it 's a queer wye o' woom' sure aneuch," said Mrs. Rorison.

"Ou maybe," said Tammas. "But we needna gae into fat ye may ca' the ethics o' the maitter. I 've liv't lang aneuch i' the wardle to ken the advantage o' jist makin' up yer min' to big yer dyke wi' the steens 't ye can get at the fit o' 't. An' though it may be my luck to big wi' roch haethens in place o' dress't san'stane or polish't marble, tak' ye my word for 't there 's a hantle o' the successfu' business o' life, in a' ranks, carriet throu o' the vera same principle."

Perhaps Mrs. Rorison was convinced; perhaps she merely thought it was no use endeavouring to convince Tammas that there was any room for sentiment in the matter beyond that for which he had made provision.

CHAPTER XIV.

BUSKIN' FOR THE BRIDAL.

If the goodman of the Muirton returned to his home on the evening of the day of which we have last spoken with the feeling of a man, who, for once at least, has done his duty to himself and his family, he was to be excused, if not also commended. And that evening Muirton unquestionably occupied a high position in the estimation of his wife as a man of sagacious instincts and diplomatic capacity. With his daughter, the feeling was one of a mixed kind; and no wonder if the young lady was just a little "fluttered" by the tidings her father had brought.

"But, papa, how cud you go to the session-clark? I hadna time to think about it at all!"

"Plenty o' time yet for a' 't 's adee, Nancy. Ye 're to be crie't the first time only, on Sunday, an' the dominie 'll lat on to nae ane till than. This is Feersday, an' ye can mak' the waddin' this day three ouks."

"An' besides, I know he socht Jean Futtrit," said the maiden, in a burst of excitement that threatened to go in the direction of hysterics. "But he *did* seek 'er!"

"It maksna futher he socht Jean Futtrit or no; he 's nae beuket wi' Jean Futtrit," was Muirton's sharp and sententious reply.

"Na; an' lat ye Jean Futtrit tak' on 'ersel'!" exclaimed the goodwife, who now came to her husband's aid vigorously. "Impident cutty 't she is! Set her up for ony sic mailin'! Aw won 'er fat creaturs 'll come till neist. It wud set 'er better to pit a decent Sunday sark on 'er peer fader, an' mak' 'im some wisse-like amo' ither fowk fan he gaes fae hame."

"An' perhaps they 'll go to law wi' him," continued the perturbed maiden; "an' him need to gae to coorts aifterhin'."

"Buff an' nonsense! Lat them try themsel's," said Muirton. "It 'll be lang to the day that Francie Futtrit 'll throw awa' gweed siller seekin' ill. Sawney 'imsel' maist thocht shame to mak' a scoug o' that—mean, ill-fashion't creatur; min' fat wye he affrontit the haill pairis' at the time o' the enterteenment."

"An' ye may say 't, man; an' foo muckle obleeg't they war to you—aw 'm seer Dykeside mith 'a thocht shame to hear Mull o' Meadaple mention't aifter 't; lat aleen tryin' to insnorl the peer guileless lad in ony sic menner."

"An' forbye that, Maister Mutch kens brawly fa 's the maist suitin' wife for a place like his," said Muirton, in a softer and more soothing tone.

"Eh, but aw aye thocht it a richt bonny pairt; an' yon hoose *so* weel seetiwat. Fa cud think o' ony ane gyaun into sic a dwallin' 't hedna a providin' confeerin—an' lat aleen a' ither thing, the creatur cudna 'a hed a decent cairt-load o' things to tak' wi' 'er oot o' yon hovel—it 's oonpossible," exclaimed the goodwife, with emotion.

"I sud think the like o' Tammas Rorison ken't fat was richt an' proper as weel 's fat the law wud alloo in ony case o' the kin'; a man 't 's hed sae muckle expairience in a' kin' o' bizness, an' been rowlin' clyer owre an' owre again," observed Muirton. "An' I 'se asseer ye he wasna lang o' pittin' 's fit upo' ony sic unseemly proposal."

"He 's a weel prencipl't an' a muckle respeckit man; there 's fyou minaisters aiven like 'im," said the goodwife.

"An' he as gweed 's promis't to coontenance your mairraige, Nancy, 'oman, an' 't war sae," added Muirton by way of climax.

The Maiden of the Muirton was largely soothed and

comforted, and, on the whole, fairly reconciled to her position and somewhat suddenly ripened prospect. She now desired to know when her lover would come to prosecute his suit. "The morn's nicht," said her father, who had not omitted the arrangement of that part; and punctual to his engagement, Sandy Mutch made his appearance at the time specified.

The reception of the truant lover by his prospective mother-in-law, who met him at the door, was not only cordial, but marked by sundry sallies of jocularity, during which Sandy's tactics and tergiversations as a wooer were broadly and hilariously hinted at; the worthy woman, with no intention evidently but that of applying an adage fitly, also reminding the young people, in her own phraseology, of the well-known fact that the course of true love never did run smooth. But all's well that ends well; and so notably in affairs of the heart, thought the goodwife of the Muirton. The behaviour of the lovers, if quieter and less demonstrative than that of the goodwife, soon became sufficiently unconstrained to allow the business of courtship, which might now be said to have reached an entirely practical stage, to go on with the requisite facility in its prescribed channel; and before Sandy Mutch left for Mill of Meadaple on that evening, it was wonderful to think of the highly satisfactory and confidential footing on which he stood with the whole family of the Muirton.

Poor Jean Futtrit! Till Sunday came, and the banns were formally "cried" for the first time, the secret was perfectly kept. It was even averred that the precentor had been instigated to gabble the names over so that nobody might catch them; or know who had formed a purpose of marriage. But perhaps this was a mere slander. And even if the precentor had been sufficiently false to statutory duty to follow such corrupt advices, it would have been of no use, for the parishioners in general would have been at the bottom of the matter at whatever expenditure of time and

trouble. At anyrate, Jean Futtrit's eye and ear were too quick to be deceived in any such clumsy fashion. Jean knew instantly from the man's very glance, furtively thrown towards her, sitting in her back pew, as he entered the lateran, and lifted his paper to "cry," that something of an ominous sort concerning herself was on hand; and she heard the names which were read off as the throng of parishioners were pushing along the "pass" with the utmost distinctness. She heard them, and she did not start up to forbid the banns. On the contrary, Jean Futtrit sat at the moment and throughout the service with an air of the utmost composure, betraying neither by look nor gesture the faintest indication of consciousness that her attitude was keenly scanned by many a peering worshipper, or that her presence there had for once served to secure for the Rev. Dawvid Mackousie a less somnolent if not more attentive audience than he was accustomed to have.

To say that Jean Futtrit was perfectly indifferent to what had emerged, or that there did not forthwith spring up in her bosom a certain desire for revenge, would be to say that she was either more or less than a woman. Jean felt that she ought at any rate to say some expressly bitter words, perhaps to do one or two things that neither Sandy Mutch nor the Maiden of the Muirton, against whom her animosity rose quite as strongly, could feel to be either complimentary or pleasant. Beyond this she had not yet fixed upon any definite scheme of vengeance. But some time must still elapse before the marriage could be consummated: and that time would, no doubt, bring its own opportunities. In the meanwhile Jean, in so far as she made herself visible to the neighbourhood, continued to be the cynosure of many eyes; or, as Bowbattle phrased it, "She was a mair thocht o' 'oman than ever she was: an' they cud but get mou' han' wi'er, an' hear Jean pit oot 'er breath upon 'im." But as this their desires were not gratified.

CHAPTER XV.

WAITING FOR THE HAPPY HOUR.

In the days that preceded his wedding, Sandy Mutch had a good deal of business on hand over and above his ordinary operations in cattle dealing. The marriage preparations he felt to be onerous, not to say irksome; only it fortunately happened that, as the time drew on, his prospective mother-in-law gradually put her hand a little further in, and relieved him correspondingly, by suggesting and also working out her own suggestions.

"Hoot, noo," said the goodwife, "an't warna the ladies, you men fowk hae nae contrivance aboot a hoose ava; ye'll jist get yer nain moder to come to Mill o' Meadaple an' set maitters in order for the hame comin'."

Probably the goodwife did not very sincerely wish this arrangement to be carried out. It was doubtful if Sandy Mutch's mother would have willingly undertaken such duties on her own undivided responsibility. Her husband, the souter, emphatically discountenanced her doing anything of the kind: and it was against his express desire that she arranged to meet the goodwife of the Muirton on the subject, which meeting enabled the goodwife to get "the hank" sufficiently in "her ain hand," without the appearance, as she thought, of seizing it too openly.

The wedding was to be a very grand affair. Sandy, when once fairly in for it, would have liked it over both quickly and quietly. The truth of the matter was that he lived in serious dread of Jean Futtrit, Jean's father, or Jean's legal representative turning up

in some fashion decidedly uncomfortable for him. But no; it did not suit the bride, still less the bride's mother, to have things hurried over in that way. Not only decency and order must be had respect to, but befitting pomp as well, and in particular the bride's *trousseau*, a very splendid one—which, for the encouragement of native industry, had been entrusted to the local "mantie-makker," in place of being ordered from the county metropolis—could not be finished in a day. So Sandy had to exercise what patience he could. At the markets he kept his eyes about him, lest they should encounter in undesired proximity the figure of Francie Futtrit of Dykeside; and oftener than once he had writhed under the impression that Jean was actually upon him with purposes of vengeance. It was Jean unmistakably that he had seen once and again pass and repass 'twixt Dykeside and the Burgh or elsewhere, but in place of turning in to Mill of Meadaple, with a vehement accusation of faithlessness against the master of that holding, the little stooping figure plodded on its way—going and coming as if no such place as Mill of Meadaple had been visible in the landscape. Yet something must surely be "up," for in ordinary times it was the rarest thing possible to see Jean Futtrit abroad, away from the unremitting toils of her industrious life. So thought Sandy Mutch; but very possibly it was only Sandy's own guilty conscience that had set his imagination at work in the matter.

Anyhow, it came to pass that, with the trifling exception of jibes rather unsparingly flung out by his brother traders in cattle, as opportunity offered—and Sandy showed less tact than he might have done in steering clear of the more demonstrative of them for the time—nothing of an overt kind had happened to disturb the even flow of blissful anticipation in Sandy Mutch's mind. Of his professional brethren, the least good natured in his style of address was our old friend Willie Futtrit. They met and met again on market days during Sandy Mutch's bridegroom era, which was

rather a lengthened one; and on these occasions the force and intensity of Willie's speech depended upon the hour of the day and the number of his completed or attempted transactions. He described poor Sandy publicly, and very audibly, as a "man-sworn scoon'rel." "My breeder's dother cud seen pit you aneth the weathercock, man," exclaimed Willie in stentorian tones, with a round score of butchers and traffickers in cattle among his audience—"Ou, ye wud strike an aul' man, wud ye, as ye 've deen afore—ye cooardy fleep! Man, gin I hed been a dizzen o' year younger, I wud a tann't the muckle fozy hide o' ye the richt gate!"

"Go at 'im, Willie, I 'll back ye for a half mutchkin o' bitters," cried a seedy-looking couper in a white hat and glazed waterproof.

"Little to me wud gar my switch fussle roun' yer lugs," continued Willie Futtrit. "Think shame o' yersel', min!"

It was easy, no doubt, for the bleared little coo-couper to vapour away thus as he stood among a group of friendly spectators, mainly of his own genus, who, he knew, would compel the stronger side to keep the peace, if need were. Only, the hour of the day at which these words were uttered was well advanced; and if blood is thicker than water Willie Futtrit had a sort of natural right to be heard in the matter. Besides, if we keep well in view the canons of taste to which men of his class hold themselves subject, the sentiments uttered may scarcely have been regarded as amounting to a breach of proper manners. By the time that he and Sandy Mutch had slept over the occurrence, it is likely that neither the one nor the other would think of it in any other light than that of a comparatively trifling ebullition such as *will* occur in the intercourse of life. And if nothing worse befel, Sandy's habitual experiences had taught him to treat the spatterings of men of Willie Futtrit's stamp with a considerable measure of indifference, if not to meet them with absolute placidity.

CHAPTER XVI.

WOOED AN' MARRIED AN' A'.

At last the marriage day came and went with due splendour, and the Maiden of the Muirton was conclusively set down as the goodwife of Mill of Meadaple. Of that fact there could be no doubt. Everything had gone as it had been wished that it should, from the formal and somewhat tedious official performance of the Rev. Dawvid Macdrousie to the conclusion of the whole proceedings, and the felicity of the new goodwife as well as the felicity of the old goodwife, her mother, was complete. And yet not quite complete. The bride had got a dress which in point of style and magnificence outshone everything of the kind that had been known in that region—a costly fawn-coloured silk, with trimmings of lively blue, and headgear to correspond. Within the comparatively narrow circle of the marriage party, the fawn-coloured silk had been duly seen and admired as the maiden assumed her place alongside the manly form of Sandy Mutch, and thereafter took such part as became her position in the general festivities on the occasion; there was no such folly enacted as that of running away on a marriage jaunt. But it was only when "the kirkin'" came on the succeeding Sunday; when Mill of Meadaple and his bride, with the bridesmaids and "young men," should walk to church in procession, that the glories of the entire bridal drapery would be fully revealed to the general community. The question of a formal "kirkin'" had been fully discussed. It was

not perfectly certain that that ceremony was altogether in accordance with the latest ideas of polite society; but undeniably "the kirkin'" afforded such opportunity for an impressive display of the bridal furnishings as could not otherwise be equalled. Therefore, the goodwife of the Muirton decided that a formal "kirkin'" there should be with the whole party walking in procession. And no wonder if the bride should exhibit a shade of tremulous anxiety about the effect of this important passage in her life.

The "kirkin'" party was marshalled and set forth from Mill of Meadaple in splendid array, and with an exuberance of animal spirits—as evidenced by the occasional loudness and hilarity of their talk—that in the estimation of some might hardly beseem the character of sober and devout worshippers. But this was merely transient; and by the time they had got halfway to church, they had calmed down to a somewhat dignified style of behaviour; inspired thereto, no doubt, by the evident curiosity which the procession had excited in the breasts of the various groups of rustics that they had already encountered. They marched on under a growing feeling of the sensational effect produced on the thickening stream of church-goers, and had just got fairly into the throng of the "kirk fowk," when suddenly there was seen walking steadily on, right in front of them, a small stooping female figure dressed precisely in the style of the bride; that is, in a fawn-coloured silk dress, trimmed with blue, and other adornments presenting even a startling resemblance to those that set off the bride's person!. Where the figure had come from, or where it was, unseen only a few seconds ago, no one of the bridal party could tell; only it was there now walking twenty yards in advance, at a pace carefully regulated by theirs, so far as one might judge. They looked at it once, and they looked at it again; they looked at each other, and the "best young man" checked a half uttered exclamation of

a profane tendency ; Sandy Mutch took decidedly red in the face, and Sandy Mutch's bride became decidedly white. Yes, there could be no mistake! It was none else than Jean Futtrit, erstwhile as humdrum in her dress as she was insignificant in personal appearance, dressed in exactly the same material, and the dress made up in exactly the same style as that of the bride, whose place she seemed but a short while ago destined to fill. All the difference was that, along with the finery on the upper part of her person, Jean seemed to have bestowed less attention on the extremities ; or it might be a mere matter of habit that made her adhere to the thick-soled home-made shoes, that best beseemed the disproportionately heavy tramp with which each fall of her foot was accompanied.

The discomfiture of the bridal party was wonderfully complete ! When Jean Futtrit turned up in the odd guise of a caricature bride, they were a full half mile from the church, and for that distance they had to march on amid the rapidly increasing body of church-goers with that same figure moving in front, and, in addition to dividing attention with them, giving rise, as they more than surmised, to a goodly amount of quizzical comment and comparison.

In church, too, the unwontedly brilliant appearance of Dydeside's daughter attracted quite as much notice as the spectacle presented by the bridal party, which was by no means inconsiderable ; and for that day at any rate, there was reason to fear, the sermon fell but ineffectually on the ears of a goodly proportion of the congregation.

As was natural, the bride and her female friends were annoyed beyond expression at the movement of Jean Futtrit, whom they vehemently denounced as a "smatchet ;" while they spoke as if Jean must have committed something like felony to be in a position to present so close a caricature, let us say, of the bridal outfit. The simple explanation of it all was that Jean,

being on intimate terms with the "mantie-makker," had been entrusted in confidence with full particulars concerning the material and "up-mak" of the bride's dress, and had taken her measures accordingly. The question was what to do now in the matter! Surely it was not to be thought that Jean Fouter, having for once made herself clarionly conspicuous, by appearing at church in a dress so utterly foreign to the local style, would repeat the extravagance in quantity. Next Sunday settled that point: for Jean appeared in her fawn-coloured silk dress as before, and repeated the proceeding of the previous Sunday, in a calm and heroic way. She walked before Mill of Meadapple and his wife as they went to church; she sat still in their view in the sacred edifice, and she walked in front of them as they returned home. The new goodwife of Mill of Meadapple, who had singly been angry and excited at first, now quailed as she thought of what might come. For it was a well-known fact that Jean Fouter, in her own thrifty way, had been wont to make her superior dresses last, on an average, for a period of seven years; and it seemed only too probable that the fawn-coloured silk, by a long way the most elaborate and costly garment that had ever yet adorned Jean's person, was destined to be the standing eye-sore of her married life for that period of time, if not longer. The thought of being thus bemocked by the gaw but kind-hearted and vulgar little woman was not to be borne. And therefore all that the question irresistibly came up—Would her position be in any wise bettered were she to forgo all further use of her fawn-coloured silk, and replace it by a blotting robe of another style and texture? Just as Jean Fouter had been shameless enough to flout the decencies of life by arraying herself in the tawdry finery of her bridal dress, might not the wicked creature attempt an equally painful insult in any other dress she might adopt? So pondered the new-made goodwife of Mill of Meadapple, as day by day passed, and

she failed to see any satisfactory outgate from the dilemma in which she had been so cruelly placed.

When weeks and months had passed the leading theme of gossip was still the same; sufficient reason being that those adversely assailed did not own that amount of self-possession which would enable them to wear an air of indifference, any more than they had that amount of self-respect which would make the appearance of indifference a reality.

"Ay, ay, man; weel that beats a' green thing. I kent Jean Futtrit was aye a pernickitty, sansheuch kin' o' a deemie in 'er nain wye; but aw didna think 't she wud 'a hed the spunk to dee the like o' that. No, aw did not."

"She 's a contermint creatur. Ye wud ken 't i' the vera face o' 'er, wi' yon lang niz an' muckle teeth. An' they said aul' Dykeside, 'er fader, aiven ekeit 'er up till 't."

"Dear be here, man. Jist to think o' the creatur stumpin' awa to the kirk Sunday aifter Sunday in claise like that, gweed day an' ill, connachin the best o' braws, forbye makin' 'ersel' a kin' o' a moniment to the haill pairis'!"

"Weel, ye ken it 's i' the naitur o' some women creaturs to be freely vicious fan ye gi'e them occasion. She 's near-han' fley't Mull o' Meadaple an' 's wife oot o' the kirk—I heard some word o' them gyaun to the 'piscopals the tither day. An' brawly does Jean ken 't, though the goodwife o' the Muirton preten's to never lat 'er een see 'er, she 's jist about the weel-warst o' them a' wi' anger an' spite, an' cud see *her* neck lithet wi' richt gweed wull."

"An' she 's keepit at it that gate sin' they war mairriet ye say? Nyod that 's near a towmon syne."

"It 's jist a towmon gin Feersday come a fortnicht; for aw min' weel it was the day aifter An'ersmas, an' I sal' the broon shalt that day," said Bowbutts—(it was Bowbutts who was entertaining a former neighbour and

visitor of his own with the chief ongoings of the place since they had last met). "Aw won'er, man, 't ye hedna heard o''t, for there's naething ever made sic a sough i' the pairt sin' the aul' goodwife o' Yon'erton was ta'en afore the Baillies for dingin owre the drummer an brakin''s ribs fan he tried to tak' 'er up for sellin' butter wi' a knyte o' croods i' the hert o' ilka pun' o''t."

"An' tyeukna Francie nae ither amen's o' Sandy, no? He mith 'a gotten 'im weel soosh't afore the shirra seerly; or aiven ta'en up to the joodges, for brakin''s dother's market."

"Weel, he's a keerious creatur Francie, man. As aw was sayin', it's commonly thocht that he hed something adee wi' Jean's protticks—futher or no, Francie was unco vyokie aboot it, for aw heard 'im mysel'. It wasna 't he hedna Sandy weel in's poo'er as maist fowk thocht; nor aiven 't he wasna weel advis't by some o' Mully's ill-willers; but Francie does things his nain gate, ye ken. 'Na, na, man; na, na, man; we ken better foo to dee nor that,' was a' that they cud get oot o' Francie; an it's said that he's tried hard several times sinsyne to get a nip o' Sandy i' the market in a quaet wye."

"It's Willie Futtrit that ees't to be the couper."

"Ou ay, but Francie can mak' a kittle aneuch bargain fan he gets the chance. It wud seem that Sandy Mutch is a kin' o' fear't at the bodie aye sin' the mairriage; an Francie kens that as weel. I've heard it said that, raither nor conter 'im or rin the chance o' a hurry wi' 'im, Sandy wud maist face his nain gweedmither aiven, wi' 'er birse up."

"Ay, man; so Francie Futtrit an''s dother Jean maun hae the fup han' o' yer neebours gey weel aifter a'."

"An' ye've jist said it, man. They div hae the fup han' o' them the richt gate as far's that gyangs."

"Foo 's Sandy like to dee upo' yon toon?"

"N-weel, I cud not say, man. Of coorse it 's been an ill sizzon for them 't hed girse ; an' they war sayin' 't he wud be gey far back ae wye an' anither ; only that 's i' the naitur o' the bizness in a menner, fan ye gae in haill wheel for dealin' amo' beasts. But it 's a fawmous toon the Mull o' Meadaple, an' aiven gin the warst cam' to the warst, there 's Muirton an' the banker 't wud nae doot contrive to set the couper upo' the bauks, an' mak' a'thing snod an' ticht atween them."

No doubt Bowbutts was perfectly right. The working capacity of Sandy Mutch was, as we have seen, a well ascertained quantity ; and if it needed extraneous influence and oversight to make the machine go safely, up to its full power of usefulness, there were reasonably ample grounds for the belief that the men to supply that want effectively were just Muirton and Tammas Rorison the banker.

FRANCIE HERRIEGERIE'S SHARGER LADDIE.

FRANCIE'S HOME.

"Aw dinna think 't oor Willikie 's thrivin', 'oman. He hisna growin' oot o' the bit this towmon'."

"Noo, fat sud gar ye say that, Francie? Willikie 's nae sae stoot; but the laddie 'll dee weel aneuch, peer thing, gin it be Gweed's wull."

"He has nae wecht ava, Bell; an' aw 'm maist seer 's airmies 's sairer wainish't nor fan I was here last."

As Francie Herriegerie uttered these words, his rough weather-browned face wore an expression of such deep and tender concern as Bell, his wife, could not behold altogether unmoved. She was a brave-hearted woman, Bell, and like a true wife felt instinctively prompted to assume her full share of the conjugal anxieties. She had had her own uneasy thoughts about Willikie; but then it was only once in three weeks that Francie could by possibility spend a night with his own family under his own roof; and doubtless Francie had cares enough on his mind otherwise; why should the short period of family intercourse be marred by complaining or gloomy words from her? Still, when Francie had touched a chord so tender it would needs vibrate; and as his look was yet an inquiring and unsatisfied look, Bell felt it to be a thing very possible for her to exhibit a culpable amount of weakness at that moment.

Luckily the baby, a thriving little chap of three months old, who lay stretched across her knees, demanded instant attention; and then Bell turned her head to listen—

"Eh, ye waukrife mannie: are na ye sleepin' yet?"

The cause of Bell's query was the subdued sound of a tiny voice in a dark bed closet off the rudely furnished room in which she and her husband sat by the fire, with a small paraffin lamp burning on the mantelpiece. The sound of the tiny voice was accompanied by a slight "hirstling" noise, and then a pale little face peered past the edge of the closet door, and the figure of the waukrife mannie, robed in his shirt alone, could be discerned standing there.

"Foo arena ye comin' to yer bed, Da?" asked the tiny voice.

"Eh, Willikie; but ye sud 'a been sleepin' ere noo."

"But I cudna sleep fan Da promis't to tak' me in o' 's bosie."

Francie Herriegerie was merely a rough ploughman, hired by the six months to drive a pair of horses to Mains of Puddleweal; and doing his daily task in a very matter-of-fact kind of way. Yet Francie Herriegerie had within him a region of feeling which, if fairly surveyed, might have been found to equal, or, it is just possible, transcend that to be discovered within the breast of many a man who would not for a single moment have hesitated to set Francie down as an uncultivated boor; that is as compared with himself and the people he cared to associate with. It was wonderful now the stretch of compassionate care which Francie would extend to the pair of horses that were under his special charge; the infinite pains he would take to make the brutes look their very best. As for chastisement they knew of no such thing at Francie's hands; or if they did it was a very extreme case, and ere Francie applied the lash, you could perceive the grounds of a full justification of the proceeding either in the

animal's persistent rebellion, or in its conscience-stricken attempts to evade the consequences of a deliberately vicious act. But it was in the bosom of his family only that Francie's human sympathies were fully to be seen; away from the rough daily companionship of his life that at any rate affected to laugh the least approach to tenderness of feeling to scorn.

Ay! but there it was that the difficulties of the situation arose. Francie Herriegerie, the son himself of a crofter in the now extinct hamlet of Housahill, had been a farm-servant in his native locality from his early boyhood upward. At the point in his lifetime where he is introduced to the reader he had been married six years, and the family's history was like this—The first year of married life had ere its close given him his flaxen-haired Jessie, now a little maiden of signal capabilities in the nursing line, as was testified by the fact that her services had begun to be in request by discerning neighbours, who, lacking such efficient aid of their own, were glad to furnish employment for Jessie's vacant time. Next to Jessie came Willikie, at an interval of eighteen months. And when Willikie was nine months old, it so happened that typhus visited the Lane in the small burgh town of Innerebrie, where Francie Herriegerie's residence was. It seized on Jessie first, and next on "the bairn," as Willikie was then styled; but the worst part came when Bell, the mother, was laid down. Jessie had struggled through, and Willikie was in process of struggling through as rapidly as the conditions of the case would allow: for although Innerebrie is a town of scarcely two thousand inhabitants, the Lane, as regards matters sanitary, had attained great maturity in point of stagnancy and filth. But at that point Bell Herriegerie was taken of the fever, and lay stretched on her humble bed for many weeks, fighting the gaunt pestilence with the odds mainly on its side; at times as low down in point of active vital power as well might be,

at other times at the opposite extreme of fevered excitement and delirium; and while Bell Herriegerie lay thus, the sad burden of the bairn seldom off her mind in her lucid moments, and the same theme frequently finding vent in her wild unconscious utterances, the two poor children were but scantily cared for. A kind neighbour lived "but and ben," whose own family having reached the estate of early manhood and womanhood, had got dispersed, to marry and shift for themselves, as wont is, leaving the father and mother, now getting frail and stiff with age, unencumbered to earn once again their own means of subsistence. This good woman, to whom the Herriegeries had been known only for a twelvemonth bygone, did what she could for the sick mother and her bairns, without hope of fee or reward. But to perform a mother's part to a couple of children and nurse a fever patient, was no light task.

Ah me! when Francie Herriegerie left his home on those late Sunday evenings and tramped three lang Scotch miles to bed in order to be in time to begin duty at five o'clock next morning, at Mains of Puddleweal, no wonder if his heart should sink within him, as he thought of his helpless household; no wonder that during the long dreary week that elapsed ere he could, per favour of that respectable farmer Mains of Puddleweal, be allowed to go back and see them again for a few hours, the image of his wife, Bell, with pallid face and sunken eyes, of his wee Jessie in her precociously grave way, striving now to aid her sick mother; and next addressing the "frettin'" Willikie, as "my wee lammie"—no wonder that all this should be much present to Francie's mind.

These were two terrible months to him. But even the longest lane has a turning. Bell recovered slowly, and for a long while it seemed not very perfectly; Jessie was quite strong again; but Willikie—well, it might be the meagreness of the sustenance he had received; or it might be that he had got too much experience of

sprawling about, outside and in, untended for hours on end, or tended only by arms too feeble to give him the nursing he needed; or it might be all these combined; but from that time Willikie had assumed an unthriven look; wan in colour and pensive in expression; in short, as it was briefly put in the Lane, "a cryn't thingie."

Francie Herriegerie was, as has been said, honestly attached to his wife; he loved his bairns, and, I think, his stronger hope was centred in Willikie. Francie had suffered much anxiety of mind, and most of all, because of the enforced absence from his family to which he had been obliged to submit in the circumstances narrated. And, after much pondering, Francie determined to end this state of matters at the term then ensuing.

"Aw'm nae gyaun to fee this winter 'oman," said Francie.

"Keep me, man; fat wud ye dee gin ye didna fee?" asked Bell.

"Try the dargin; there's plenty o' orra wark i' the kwintra."

"But ye've never been ees't wi' the pick an' the spaud; aw doot ye winna tak' weel wi' 't, Francie."

"Aw cunna like it waur nor mony ane's deen; an' I'll win hame at even at ony rate."

"Ye sud think weel aboot it, man, afore ye gi'e up a steady place, an' tak' yer chance o' broken weather an' that."

"I've thocht aboot a' that, 'oman; but fat is't that a bodie wu'dna put up wi' raither nor be aye awa fae you an' the bairns."

Bell was still a little dubious; but she did not oppose the project. Indeed, she was secretly glad at the thought of one element in the prospective change of circumstances, and that was the hope of her husband getting "hame at even." Though a man of settled habits and strong domestic attachments, Francie during his first

few years of life as a married ploughman had never been able to spend so large a proportion of his time as one night in seven with his wife and family. It had been the wise and humane policy of the men who had razed his native Housahill, and extinguished other seats of cottar life, to make sure that labour-bred paupers should not come into existence on their lands; and in this they were achieving a certain success, at the trifling cost of ultimately extinguishing not only the native labourer-pauper but the native labourer himself, and obtaining both pauper and labourer of imported origin and deteriorated character.

So Francie Herriegerie left farm service, and brought home his "kist"; and the whip, that formed the emblem of his office as a "horseman." He got himself furnished with a new spade, and a "tramp" to save the sole of his boot while operating as trencher or drainer. The work was not what he had been accustomed to; he felt it to be somewhat hard and irksome, indeed; and then he had to sit down day by day on a big stone in the cold December air to eat his modest dinner of oatcakes and cheese, with a drop of small beer to wash it down. Still as such work, which could be got by merely walking a mile and a half out, would enable him to earn fourteen shillings a-week, and admit of his sleeping every night under his own roof, Francie had begun to think it might be at any rate endured for the sake of the contingent advantages. But just then the frost and snow came on; "all out-door labour was stopped," as the agricultural paragraph writers say; and oh, what a weary six weeks followed!

Weariness was not the worst of it, however. Francie Herriegerie's weekly revenue was stopped too. The previous time of sickness had fully exhausted his small savings; and when compelled, as he best could, to get the food required in his home on the credit of the future, Francie felt not a little discouraged. Here was he, the bread-winner, reduced to the position of a mere

bread-eater, the freshness of his appetite simply serving to remind him unpleasantly of the rate at which he was eating himself into the miller's debt.

A winter with much "broken weather" made Francie's "dargin"—distasteful at best—so profitless that next term saw him re-engaged to farm work; and so, at the date when our sketch opens, he had, after one or two changes of master, returned to Mains of Puddleweal to drive a pair of horses for that careful and industrious agriculturist.

CHAPTER II.

THE FAMILY OUTLOOK.

Francie Herriegerie and his wife went to bed, and Willikie was soon in his coveted position, nestling in his father's bosom. Next day being the Sabbath, Francie enjoyed the rare privilege of lying abed till Bell had the breakfast actually on the table, guarding the baby, and hearing Willikie's recital of various small matters interesting to him that were of recent occurrence, and so unknown to his father. And then the laddie was so clever! Why, verily, he had picked up the alphabet at his mother's knee, from the first page of the Shorter Catechism, in almost no time, and now would spell you out a simple lesson right fluently; or, better still, set him to repeat some bit of verse—one of those very homely nursery rhymes he had caught by hearing them from his mother's lips, a snatch of a ballad, a portion of a paraphrase or psalm, learnt in the same way, and the susceptibility to emotional feeling at least in the child would strike you, as well as the premature gravity of expression on his eager little face. And if Francie Herriegerie could not readily put his feelings in words, it was not that feeling did not exist in his breast, and feeling too of some strength.

"Lat Da hear yer new psalm, Willikie," said Bell, speaking from the fire-side, during a short break in the prattle going on in the bed; and Willikie seating himself on the pillow, with clasped hands, gave off with a sort of quaint emphasis the whole of the twenty-third psalm, much to his father's delight. And then, as

Francie was now stirring, Willikie trotted away and sat down by the side of the fire till Jessie or his mother should assist him in putting on his clothes.

"Weel," observed Francie at an after stage of that Sabbath day, it 's keerious noo. I cudna 'a never learnt to get screeds o' things upo' my tongue like that laddie."

"Fa, Willikie?" asked Bell. "He has maist mair wut nor an' aul' bodie; but you see fan creaturs is some weykly i' the body, it 's af'en made up to them i' the heid."

"Aw'm seer he wud bleck mony a bairn twice his age 't 's been raiths at the skweel."

"Ay wud 'e," said Bell promptly, and evidently pleased to find Francie not indisposed now to dwell rather on Willikie's intellectual promise, than on his lack of physical stamina, "but ye ken it 's nae the skweel 't 'll gi'e nae ane naitral pairts, man."

"Na—na," said Francie, thoughtfully. "An' we hed ony chance but o' gettin' 'im intill ony kin' o' a berth come time, faur it wud be mair heid wark nor eesin 's han'ies at roch lawbour the furth."

"Weel, ye wudna ken. There 's aye a Providence. An' the lave 's richt weel an' strong noo."

"He mith be a merchan', or onything, gin fowk hed for-speakers to get 'im ta'en in; but that 's only for them 't 's weel upon 't, an' the like o' hiz cudna expeck it—Fat wud ye think o' tryin' to get 'im learn't some licht trade o' some kin'?"

"An' foo sudna we, gin we be a' spar't a fyou years?"

"It 's sae ill gettin' ony fittininment; an' ye wudna like to mak' a souter nor a tailor o' 'im?" said Francie, half-inquiringly.

"Hoot, man," was the answer, "aw won'er to hear ye speak that gate as gin there war nae ither trades but that. There 's Maister Gabriel, the watchmakker, wi' a naitral heich shooder, an' a muckle limp forbye, peer bodie, 't was but an orphant laddie, an' neen to leuk

aifter 'im but the frem't fae the time 't he was a gyangrel infant they tell me—fat sud hin'er Willikie to be a watchmakker an' 't war sae?"

The idea had not before dawned on Francie's mind; but it pleased him immensely. For it was quite clear that Mr. Gabriel, the watchmaker, must at some former time have been also a wee cryn't laddie—as he was cryn't still in his grey middle age—and if he had been a friendless orphan to boot, that was worse than Willikie's case still—yet now had he a fine shop and a flourishing business. Bell saw the pleasing impression that had been made, and she failed not to follow it up with other cheering and comfortable words.

"An' ye ken Jessie 'll seen be worth 'ersel' an' mair, to onybody 't 's needin' the like o' 'er to help them."

"But ye wudna speak o' feein' her this lang time—ye 've mair need o' 'er to help yersel'. Forbye 't, she wud need some skweelin' yet."

"'Deed, Francie, it was little skweelin' 't ever I got; an' though Jessie, peer 'oman, hisna hed muckle leasure, for helpin' wi' the bairns an' that, she can read, ye ken, as claer 's onything, an' vreet nae that ill."

Bell, it will be perceived, had both hopefulness and contrivance.

Francie Herriegerie, like a good christian, had gone to the kirk that day, and Jessie by his side. The Rev. Dr. Dryaneuch was a sound and not too lively preacher, who in every several text selected by him contrived to find "three things" demanding attention; neither more nor less; which he duly expounded, and then followed up with an application. Francie had listened in a somewhat vague way, it must be confessed, as a man might do who had hardly become alive to anything like a line of connection between the doctrines so baldly and formally enunciated, and the hard, struggling human life he was leading. He had even once or twice nodded, and lapsed into momentary unconsciousness, during which the voice of the preacher went

bumming over him, as the sound of the west wind shaking the branches on an autumn gloaming.

It was with a sense of positive relief that, when the modest dinner of the family was over, Francie heard Bell, his wife, a blress to Jessie—and not to him—the question where Dr. Dryaneuch's text had been. Truth to say, Francie had completely forgot; and he almost started at the thought when his wife interrogated Jessie, who gave chapter and verse as accurately as Dr. Dryaneuch himself could have done. And possibly this simple incident, and the sincere and homely intercourse that went on while the bairns read their small lessons, and answered the simple questions put by their mother, not only made up to Francie Herriegerie pretty well for the formal sermon, the point of which he had missed, but that they in themselves constituted an informal sermon of a very wholesome and practical sort.

The afternoon passed away only too rapidly: and again Francie took stick in hand to return to Mains of Pubbleweal, Bell and the bairns accompanying him to the "heid o' the toon," where they bade good night till next visit.

That night Francie Herriegerie plodded on his solitary way between Innerebrie and his master's farm with, on the whole, a lighter heart than he had expected. Below his arm was a blue check bag, containing his supply of shirts and stockings for the next three weeks, all carefully washed and repaired by Bell, his wife: and Francie felt more and more what an admirable wife she was; a woman verily to lean upon and in whose society there was helpfulness and strength for him in maintaining his part in the battle of life; though, to be sure, the thought *would* come up that outward circumstances made that battle harder to him than it ought to have been. But for this Francie saw no possibility of help. He had already made the one experiment that seemed open to him in the way of attempted change, and the result had been the reverse of satisfactory.

CHAPTER III.

AT MAINS OF PUDDLEWEAL.

The thought that mainly occupied Francie Herriegerie's mind from the date of his last visit to Innerebrie till his return again to see his family was how he might contrive in time to raise, in the shape of surplus revenue, the sum of three pounds, which it was understood Mr. Gabriel required as apprentice fee for each young man whom he trained to the business of watchmaker. Doubtless, he had long to wait yet until Willikie should be fit for apprenticing—assuming that Mr. Gabriel should prove willing to take him under indenture—yet the subject was one fitted to bulk largely in his mind; and Francie dwelt much, and not altogether unhopefully, on the prospect that seemed to him, in a general way, open for the advancement in life of his eldest son.

No doubt Francie Herriegerie's castle in the air was a castle of very modest dimensions; yet the process of constructing it gave him, for the time being, a reasonable amount of satisfaction. But, as the months wore on, the hope of its being ultimately realised in his experience did not receive strength from the hard facts of life. Evidently Willikie was not improved nor improving in health. To Francie's anxious gaze, as he marked the laddie at each succeeding visit, it seemed indeed that things were going the other way. True, Willikie's wonderfully keen mental faculties were as lively as ever, but even his fond mother could not now deny that the poor boy was less and less able to run

about, and got sooner tired of his small amusements. He would now sit by the hearth in his diminutive arm-chair silent and wearied, drawing a long sigh at intervals, and gazing earnestly and patiently at his mother as she moved about the house. And then it came to be that it was only at times he could be a whole day out of bed.

It was now early spring. The darkest time of another dark winter had passed by, during which Francie Herriegerie had been as assiduous in his attention to his home and his family as circumstances would permit. With the re-ascent of the sun in the heavens, certain vaguely defined hopes of some kind of "betterment" that "the lang day" might bring to Willikie, began to float in Francie's mind; for with the primrose peeping out from its mossy bed, the wee early gowan looking up from the green sward that the keen ploughshare was tearing up before him, and the birds beginning to pour forth their cheerful strains from bush and brake, it was hard indeed to think of a bright young life passing into darkness and silence.

It was at this season that Mains of Puddleweal sent his carts on a weekly "vaege" to the burgh of Innerebrie to fetch his supplies of lime, and what not, for the opening season, and carry off the grain he might wish to put to market. To Francie Herriegerie the weekly "vaege" was most welcome, as furnishing prized opportunities of seeing his wife and children. Not that these visits were a recognised part of the programme as arranged by Mains of Puddleweal. His instructions simply were, "Noo, boys, jist lowse only as lang's ye cairry up the lades, an' get in yer puckle shalls—gin ye slack the baims, an' throw aff their collars the beasts 'll be throu' wi' their feed, an' ready to tak' roud again faneever yer loaden't;" but as Mains sent four carts and two men, (including Francie Herriegerie) to drive, Francie, with the concurrence of his fellow-servant, who undertook the temporary guidance of the whole four horses, was

wont to start off in advance when the return journey had been commenced, and just to the extent to which he managed to outwalk or outrun the horses in the mile of road between the lime depôt and his house might he have the privilege of enjoying the society of home. Whip in hand, and minus his coat, Francie would contrive to distance his companion with the carts considerably; yet after allowing a little margin to be made up in the way of overtaking the carts after they had passed the end of the Lane, some twenty minutes was about the utmost limit of time to be counted upon. Still these fugitive weekly visits were felt to be cheering and grateful on both sides; and even the diminutive and sickly Willikie was stirred into somewhat of vivacity at the thought of his father's returning hebdomadal call. Jessie had carried him out to watch the carts as they passed down on a certain day, and the sight of the handsome well-fed animals, with their glossy skins and shining harness, made a deep impression on Willikie's mind, as his frequent references to the subject in the form of queries addressed to his sister testified. Next time when Francie called at his home he was put into a position of some embarrassment when Willikie, looking up in his face in a very earnest fashion, asked—

"Da, will ever *I* be muckle, an' get a fup like yours?"

"I cudna say, Willikie, man—speer at yer mither," said Francie, at a loss for a better reply.

"But aw did speer, an' she didna say naething."

To "say naething" would also have been Francie's desire; but the question was very directly put, and an answer evidently expected, and he accordingly stammered out something to the effect that Willikie "maybe wud be muckle some day, an' hae a hantle better an' gran'er things nor a fup."

"An' wull 't be lang till I grow some better: 'caus' I wud like to win oot fan I'm able to gyang, an' Jessie

nae cairryin' me, to see the bonny gowanies, and the sheepies atein the green girse? Divnin *ye* see them, da, ilka day?"

It was only the case of a rough farm servant and his belongings, yet such words as these would dwell with a painful sharpness in the ears of Francie Herriegerie for days after their utterance. Was it cause of wonder, good reader, that he should be troubled and downcast in such times of lonely musing, when the images of those he loved were very present to him, and their enforced absence became all the more vividly realised?

By and bye the time of "vacging" was over for a season; and while Willikie's case was evidently getting more critical, Francie's chances of visiting his home were again reduced to the statutory three-weekly round, unless when he chose, as he once or twice did when unusually anxious, to tramp down those three miles from Mains of Puddleweal to Innerebrie after performing his ten hours' task at plough or harrows, and tramp back the same road again before going to sleep. Then came the message from Bell, by the mouth of an itinerating egg dealer of the female sex, whose good offices she had sought, that Willikie was a "gweed hantle waur." In his anxious perplexity under this information, Francie, instinctively searching after a little sympathy, mentioned the matter to Mains of Puddleweal, for Mains was not altogether an inhumane man; and Mains offered the remark, "Is that the bairn 't's been sae lang in a dwynin' wye?" Nothing further occurred to him to add on the subject: and his thoughts taking naturally a practical direction, he proceeded to expatiate on the fact, that a very fine mare, of which Francie had charge and of which Francie had never failed to be careful in the highest degree, was closely approaching the time when she would give birth to a foal; and Mains, with the utmost earnestness, enforced on Francie the necessity of the mare being closely attended to at night, even more than by day, till the interesting event should be over.

"Ye 'll need-a be constant aboot the toon, Francie, oot o' oors ; the beast has a feerious nervish temper, an' wud hardly lat me, aiven, lay a han' upon 'er, lat aleen unco fowk ; but she kens you, an' 't wud be a byous thing to hae 'er mislippen't. She canna owregae an' ouk or twa noo at the farrest."

And so several days and nights passed on, during which Francie Herriegerie had heard no report of Willikie's state. It may be believed that it gave him not less concern than the trust imposed by Mains of Puddleweal, and to which Francie, as a trustworthy servant, continued unflinchingly faithful.

CHAPTER IV.

THE LAST OF WILLIKIE.

"An' the bairnie 's at its rest, than?"

"Ou ay, peer thing; its feeht 's at an en'."

"Weel, weel; it cud 'a never been naething but an objeckie. Fan was 't no?"

"It wear awa' the streen i' the gloamin, jist aboot sindoon."

"An' foo 's Bell 'ersel', peer creatur? She 's hed a weary on-wyte, nicht an' day, this month an' mair."

"Weel, 'oman, she 's won'erfu', considerin'—the back 's aye fittit for the burden, ye ken."

"Deed it 's rael true; but she 's a brow sensible deem, Bell, weel-a-wat. Was Francie doon bye ere the cheenge cam'?"

"Eh na, 'oman! Francie hedna won doon for a filie bye-gane; something or ither adee amo' Mains's horse-beasts hed keepit 'im fest at the toon oot o' oors. Aweel, they hed spoken o' sen'in' for 'im fan the littlean's eenies begood to be deith-like—the creaturie was wastit awa' till a perfeck atomie—but ere onybody cud be rankit oot to gae, Willikie was in a better place. Syne Francie—he hed been o' the road, peer stock—cam' in aboot in little mair nor half an 'oor."

"He wud be sair affeckit no!—he liket the laddikie."

"Liket 'im! Weel an' he didna like 'im. Keep me, 'oman, he jist birstet an' grat like a vera bairn. Aw thocht naething but 't he wud lift the corpie aifter it was streekit an' haud it in 's oxter in spite o' 's a'."

The interlocutors in this case were two of Bell

Herriegerie's female neighbours in the Lane—one of them the kindly old woman whose existence has been previously indicated, and on whom Bell had been wont to rely more or less in times of affliction. Their conversation will sufficiently inform the reader of the fact and circumstances of Willikie's death.

Francie Herriegerie's Sharger Laddie was no more of this earth; and Francie felt the stroke with great intensity—an intensity how much aggravated by the circumstances of his position I shall not pretend to say. Clearly there was some ground to allege that it was not the fault of Mains of Puddleweal, taking things as they stood, that Francie Herriegerie had found it impossible to be present by his child's deathbed, or even to have the mournful satisfaction of seeing the feeble life go out; and that now, after a prolonged burst of emotion over his dead little son, he was obliged to leave all the home he had on earth, and return to the farm to attend to the interests of his master, and the comfort of his master's "horse-beasts." For what could Mains do? It was right that his horses should be properly attended to at all times; and when a very valuable mare had just added to his stock a very fine foal, and when the animal at that critical time was always "fashious" in temper to the last degree, it was right and fitting that the man who was paid to attend to the mare, and who alone could do it safely and efficiently, should not be out of the way of duty. If stress be laid on the fact that Mains's sympathies were so closely linked with the welfare of his own live stock, as compared with the life, or as it might happen, death, of any of the members of his servant's family, it is simply an illustration of human nature in one of its not very uncommon aspects; and an aspect that is hardly liable as a rule to be reckoned disreputable or depraved.

That Francie Herriegerie should have been separated from his family as he was—as for years he had been compelled to be, like many others of his class—reflected

discredit and even positive guilt somewhere there could be no manner of doubt. But we must not prove untrue charges against Maine of Parkhead, not even let at this time felt and complained of the circumstance. It was Francie's duty to tell him of William's death, and to ask a little needful leave of absence to enable him to attend to matters connected with the child's funeral.

"Ye wadna needin' mair nor twa-three days, Francie," said Maine. "It tak's nae a time, ye ken, trailin' hyne awa' sae far."

"But I winna need mair nor ae broken day; an' I'm pittin' a man i' my place."

"Still an' on, it 'ud weel to be oot o' the road owre afore the gloamin' nicht. An' mony a ane hearts—I never can't kittle it. However." And then Maine broke off abruptly, leaving Francie to infer that as matters stood, the poor dear little William required to be buried, was just one of those things that could not be helped, and consequently must be submitted to.

On Uncle William's burial day, Francie Herriegerde sent his substitute at the plough a-field, and gave him all needful directions for the satisfactory performance of a day's work. He then entered the trap that led to the somewhat dingy sleeping apartment over the stable, known as the "chamber." He found his "best" on, took out his little small-toothed Sunday hat, and the best pair of gloves he had; in the drawer of a rickety old chest of drawers he found a clean shirt, and then he sat down solitary to his dinner to consider the solitary way in Innerlaw to seek his own living and death. That the least within Francie Herriegerde should feel lonely and desolate as he realised on his way will hardly be reckoned matter for wonder; and as he solemnly pursued his way, little William's cattle from the farms in the nearby Lane of Innerlaw on this dismal spring day, to the quiet kirkyard of his native parish,—a distance of four miles—there mingled with the feeling of sorrow and bereavement a sense of abandonment and homelessness which, in regard to outward circum-

stances, ought not to have been there, and which added a gratuitous element to the cup of bitterness and grief. Francie's entire thoughts and affections clung to his wife and his now broken family; but alas! for the prospect of enjoying the sad luxury of sorrowing in their company! When the little coffin should be placed in its dark abode, and the small burial company broken up, it was to Mains of Puddleweal's service, and not to his wife and family, that he must forthwith betake himself; and then would begin again the old round of the three-weekly visit to Innerebrie—that; nothing else and nothing more. And Francie's heart fell very low at the thought of it all.

Francie Herriegerie possessed a rough honest nature and strong natural affections. He was not, perhaps, a man of keen intellect; nor even a man capable of sustained reflection to definite ends; yet did the thought strike him in a way that was sufficiently real, if more or less crude, that things might be, and ought to be, somehow, different from what he felt and experienced them to be. As the funeral company had climbed up the Kirkton Brae, they had passed near by the site of the old hamlet of Housahill, where he was born and had spent his boy days, now part of a ploughed field without mark of human habitation, and which knew him and his no more; and the sight but deepened the feeling of desolation. He remembered the days of his infancy; and the companions of his boyhood, all gone thence; some to addict themselves to the occupations of city life; some to till the earth in other lands. And for himself, whom circumstances had tied to his native region, this was all the needy lords of the soil saw meet to do for his social and domestic life! While he gave his strength with single-hearted honesty as the laborious and capable tiller of the ground, they denied him the shelter of the humblest home within range of the acres he tilled.

But ere the kirkyard gate had been reached, the

kindly old bellman had gone to the west gable of the kirk. When he saw the funeral approaching, he grasped the bell-rope and tolled the bell for little Willikie, just as if little Willikie had been an old and responsible parishioner. Then when the grave was closed, the old man said—

"Ay, Francie, man, an' that 's the first 't ye 've laid here o' yer nain. Ou, weel, he 's laid neist to yer fader, laddie—ye 'll min' fat wye the aul' fowk was pitt'n doon. Aw b'lieve yer gran'fader lies here tee, though I'm nae jist seer aboot the grail. It 's weel to keep the rinnins o' the like o' that i' yer min', for my memory 's nae sae gweed as it was ance ; an' this is the hame 't the lave o' ye wud lickly like to come till."

The association of ideas is at times strange enough. To the old bellman it came naturally to speak of the kirkyard as a "hame." And in this case the thoughts that had been passing through Francie Herriegerie's mind, and the well-remembered tones of the old bellman, familiar to him from his childhood, at once and forcibly awakened the feeling that in literal truth the old kirkyard was the only place on earth that had a home-like connection to him, and where at last surely nobody would grudge him a place of rest in the bosom of his family. And, with this impression deeply implanted in his mind, the woe-begone mourner returned to the house of the "frem't," there to resume his labour, and muse on day by day, in the solitary communings of his own heart, on the blight of all the might-have-been in his family's future signified by the decease of his clever little Willikie, now sleeping silently with his fathers under the green sod.

And thus endeth the history of Francie Herriegerie's Sharger Laddie.

BAUBIE HUIE'S BASTARD GEET.

JOCK HUIE'S HOUSEHOLD—BAUBIE ENTERS LIFE.

I AM not prepared to say how far Baubie Huie's own up-bringing had been a model of judicious parental nurture. There was ground to fear that it had not been at all times regulated by an enlightened regard to the principle laid down by King Solomon, concerning the training up of children. Jock Huie had a muckle sma' faimily, crammed into limited space, in so far as the matter of house accommodation was concerned. It was a little, clay-built, "rape-thackit" cot in which Jock, with Eppie, his wife, and their family dwelt; and the "creaturs" came so thickly, and in such multitude, that Jock, who was a "darger," and did "days' warks" here and there, as he could find them, experienced rather queer sensations when an unusually "coorse" day happened to coop him up at home among the "smatterie" of youngsters.

"Saul o' me, 'oman," would Jock exclaim, when patience had reached its limit; "the din o' that bairns o' yours wud rive a heid o' steen—gar them be quaet, aw'm sayin', or I 'll hae to tak' a horse fup to them."

"Haud yer tongue, man; gin ye war amo' them fae screek o' day till gloamin licht 's I am, ye mith speak. Fat can the creaturs dee fan they canna get leuket owre a door?" Eppie would reply.

Notwithstanding his formidable threat, Jock Huie rarely lifted his hand in the way of active correction of his offspring. His wife, who was not indisposed to

govern a little more sharply if she could, knew of only one way of enforcing obedience, or some approach thereto, when matters had come to a decided pass of the character indicated, and which may be best described in plain English as indiscriminate chastisement, applied with sufficient heartiness, though it might be quite as much in accordance with the dictates of temper as of calm reason. And so it came to pass that, as most of the youthful Huies were gifted with pretty definite wills of their own, the progress of physical development on their part might be taken, in a general way, as indicative, in inverse proportion, of the measure of moral and mental sway which the parental will was able to exercise over them.

All that by the way, however. Jock Huie got his family brought up as he best could, and off his hands mainly; and he, personally, continued his dargin' with perhaps a little less vir than aforetime. Jock was a man of large bones and strong bodily frame; when thirty he had physical strength that seemed equal to any task, and endurance against which no amount of rough usage appeared to tell with evil effect. But after all, men of Jock Huie's class do not wear long. Jock was now a man only a few years past fifty: yet digging in wet drains and ditches, and eating a bit of oat cake, washed down with "treacle ale," to his dinner, day by day, had procured for him a very appreciable touch of "rheumatics," and other indications that he had fairly passed his prime.

And Baubie, his eldest daughter, though not the eldest member of his family, for Jock had various sons older than she—Baubie had grown up—a buxom, ruddy cheeked "quine" of nineteen. She was servan' lass to the farmer of Bright—Briggies in short.

I remember very distinctly a bonnie summer gloamin at that time. It was gey late owre i' the evenin'. Baubie had milket the kye, seyt the milk, and wash'n up her dishes. Her day's work was at last fairly done, and

why should not Baubie go out to the Toon Loan to enjoy the quiet scene as the cool dews of evening began to fall upon the landscape around the cosy, old-fashioned farm "steading" of Brigfit.

It matters nothing in this narration where I had been that evening, further than to say that, as I pursued my journey homeward, the road took me past the corner of Briggies' stable, where, altogether unexpectedly to me, I encountered Baubie Huie "in maiden meditation fancy free." Though Baubie's junior by a twelvemonth or so, I had developed since we two had last met from a mere herd loon into a sort of rawish second or third horseman. We had known each other more or less from infancy, Baubie and I, and our talk during the short parley that now ensued had a tinge of the bygone time in it; though, of course, we could not help giving fulfilment, in our own way, to the saying that out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh; and, naturally enough, at that season of life, that which most occupied our hearts was the present as it bore on our respective positions and prospects.

My own notion (it may be said in confidence) was that I was climbing up the pathway to maturity of life and definiteness of position with creditable alacrity; but in this direction I speedily found that Baubie Huie had fairly out-distanced me. Why, here was the very same "quine" who, almost the last time I saw her, was lugging along a big, sulky bairn, half her own size, wrapped in an old tartan plaid, and her weather-bleached hair hanging loosely about her shoulders—and that bairn her own younger brother—that very "quine," giggling and tossing her head knowingly as she spoke, in what seemed a tone of half masculine licence, about the "chiels" that were more or less familiarly known as sweethearts among young women in the neighbourhood of Brigfit. In matters of love and courtship, I was, it must be confessed, an entire novice; whereas in such affairs, it was obvious, Baubie

had become an adept; and if I had been somewhat put out by the ready candour with which she criticised the physical appearance and general bearing of this and the other young man—hangers on after Baubie, I was given to understand—I was nothing short of completely "flabbergasted" when, just as we were parting, she said—

"Dinna ye never gae fae hame at even, min? Ye mith come owre the gate some nicht an' see 's."

What my confused and stuttering reply amounted to, I cannot really say—something grotesquely stupid, no doubt. What it called forth on Baubie's part, at any rate, was another round of giggling and the exclamation, as she turned off toward the dwelling house of Brigfit—

"Weel, weel, Robbie, a' nicht wi' you; an' a file o' the morn's mornin'."—This was simply the slang form of saying "good night" among persons of Baubie's class. And she added—"I'll need awa' in; for there 's Briggies, the aul' snot, at the ga'le o' the hoose—he 'll be barrin''s oot again, eenoo."

Now, far be it from me to say that Baubie was a vicious or immodest young woman. I really am not prepared to say that she was anything of the sort. She had simply got the training that hundreds in her station of life in these northern shires do—home training that is. And after she left the parental roof, her experiences had been the common experiences of her class—that is to associate freely with promiscuous assemblages of farm-servants, male and female; mainly older than herself, without any supervision worth mentioning, as she moved from one situation to another. And how could Baubie, as an apt enough scholar, do other than imbibe the spirit and habits of those in whose companionship she lived day by day? Baubie was simply the natural product of the system under which she had been reared. Her moral tone, as indexed by her speech, might not be very high; and yet, after all, it is very possible to have the mere verbal proprieties fully at-

tended to, where the innate morality is no whit better. Coarseness in the outer form, which is thrust on the view of all, is bad enough; depravity in the inner spirit, which is frequently concealed from many, may be a good deal worse.

Brigfit was a decent man; a very decent man, for he was an elder in the parish kirk, and a bachelor of good repute. He was a careful, industrious farmer, the extent of whose haudin enabled him to "ca' twa pair." Briggies was none of your stylish gentlemen farmers; he needed neither gig nor "shalt" to meet his personal convenience, but did his ordinary business journeys regularly on foot. And he stood on reasonably amicable terms with his servants; but he sought little of their confidence, and as little did he give to them of his own. Only Briggies had certain inflexible rules, and one was that his household should be in bed every night by nine o'clock in winter, and an hour later in summer; when he would himself solemnly put the bar on the door, and then walk as solemnly along to the "horn en'" to seek repose.

Briggies was a very early riser, and as it was his hand that usually put the bar on the door at night, so, honest man, was it his hand that ordinarily took it off in the morning in time to see that the household proper and the occupants of the outside "chaum'er," consisting of the male servants, were stirring to begin the labours of the day in due season. According to Baubie Huie's account, the bar was sometimes tampered with during the interval by the "deems;" only if matters were gone about quietly enough, Briggies, whether or not he might suspect aught in that way, usually said nothing.

"Augh, Robbie, man! Fear't for Briggies kennin? Peer bodie! fan onything comes in 's noddle aboot 's nowte beasts he canna get rest, but 'll be up an' paumerin aboot the toon' o' the seedence o' the nicht, fan it 's as mark 's pick in winter, forbye o' the simmer

evenin's. So ae nicht i' the spring time that me an' my neebour hedna been wuntin to gae to oor beds, we pits oot the lamp in gweed time, an' sits still, as quaet 's pussy, till Briggies hed on the bar an' awa' till 's bed. I'm nae sayin' gin onybody was in ahin that or no, but lang aifter the wee oor hed struck'n, me an' Jinse was thereoot. I suppose the chiels hed made mair noise nor they sud 'a deen, caperin' owre the causeway wi' their muckle tacketie beets. At ony rate in a blink there was Briggies oot an' roon to the byres wi' the booet in 's han'. Fan he hed glampit aboot amo' the beasts till he was satisfeet, he gaes awa' to the hoose again ; an' we wusna lang o' bein' aifter 'im. But fudder or no he hed leuket ben to the kitchie to see gin we wus there, he hed pitten the bar siccar aneuch on upo' the door this time, I can tell ye ; an' nae an in cud we win for near an oor, till we got an aul' ledder an' pat it up to the en' o' the hoose, an' syne I made oot to creep in at the ga'le winnockie—Fat did he say aifterhin? Feint a thing. Briggies never loot on, though he cudna but 'a hed 's ain think, 'cause gin he didna hear huz, he be 't till 'a kent 'gyaun oot' that the bar sudna 'a been aff o' the door at that time o' nicht."

In this wise did Baubie Huie keep up the colloquy, my own side of which, candour compels me to say, was very badly sustained ; for had I been ever so willing to take my part, the requisite fluency and *abandon* had not been attained, to say nothing of the utter absence of knowledge germane to the subject in hand, and personally acquired.

As a matter of course, I did not accept Baubie Huie's invitation to visit Brigfit. If the truth were to be told, I was too much of a greenhorn ; one who would have been accurately described by Baubie and her associates as utterly destitute of "spunk." My Mentor of that date, a vigorous fellow of some eight and twenty years, whose habits might be not incorrectly described by the word "haiveless," whose speech was at least as free, as

refined, and who occupied the responsible position of first horseman, did not indeed hesitate to characterise my behaviour in relation to such matters, generally, in almost those very words. He knew Baubie Huie, moreover, and his estimate of Baubie was expressed in the words—"Sang, she 's a richt quine you, min; there 's nae a deem i' the pairt 'll haud 'er nain wi' ye better nor she 'll dee; an' she 's a fell ticht gweedleukin hizzie tee," which, no doubt, was a perfectly accurate description according to the notions entertained by the speaker of the qualities desirable in the female sex.

However these things may be, Baubie Huie continued to perform her covenanted duties to the farmer of Bright; and, so far as known, yielding the elder average satisfaction as a servant during the summer "half-year."

CHAPTER II.

BAUBIE RETURNS HOME.

It was nearing the term of Martinmas, and Jock Huie, who had been laid off work for several days by a "beel't thoom," was discussing his winter prospect with Eppie, his wife. Meal was "fell chape," and the potato crop untouched by disease; but Jock's opinion was that, as prices were low for the farmer, feein' would be slack. Cattle were down too, and though the price of beef and mutton was a purely abstract question for him personally—he being a strict vegetarian in practice, not by choice but of necessity—Jock was economist enough to know that the fact bore adversely on the farmer's ability to employ labour; so that, altogether, with a superfluity of regular servants unengaged, and a paucity of work for the common "darger" in the shape of current farming improvements going on, he did not regard the aspect of things as cheering for his class.

"Aw howp neen o' that loons o' oors 'll throw themsel's oot o' a place," said Jock. "Wud ye think ony o' them wud be bidin'?"

"That wud be hard to say, man," replied Eppie.

"That widdifus o' young chiels 's aye sae saucy to speak till," said Jock; whether he meant that the sauciness would be exhibited in the concrete from his own sons toward himself, or if the remark applied to the bearing of servant chiels generally on the point under consideration, was not clear. "But better to them tak' a sma' waage nor lippen to orra wark; an' hae to lie aboot idle the half o' the winter."

"Weel ken we that," said Eppie, with a tolerably lively recollection of her experiences in having previously had one or two of her sons "at hame" during the winter season. "Mere ate-meats till Can'lesmas; I'm seer fowk hae's little need o' that; but creaturs'll tak' their nain gate for a' that."

"Aw howp Baubie's bidin' wi' Briggies, ony wye," added Jock.

"I ken naething aboot it," said Eppie, in a tone that might be described as dry; "Baubie's gey an' gweed at keepin' 'er coonsel till 'ersel'."

It was only a fortnight to the term, and Jock would not be kept long in suspense regarding those questions affecting the family arrangements on which he had thus incidentally touched. In point of fact, his mind was set at rest so far when only half the fortnight had run. For the feeing market came in during that period, and as Jock's thumb had not yet allowed him to resume work, he "took a step doon" to the market, where he had the satisfaction of finding that his sons had all formed engagements as regular farm servants. As for Baubie, though Jock learned on sufficient authority that she was present in the market, he failed to "meet in" with her. Concerning Baubie's intended movements, he learnt, too, that she was *not* staying with Briggie's; Briggies himself had indeed told him so; but beyond that Jock's inquiries on the subject did not produce any enlightenment for him.

Subsequently to the feeing market, Jock Huie had once and again reverted to the subject of Baubie's strange behaviour in keeping the family in ignorance of her movements and intentions, but without drawing forth much in the way of response from his wife beyond what she had generally expressed in her previous remark.

The afternoon of the term day had come, and servants who were flittin' were moving here and there. I can-

not state the nature of the ruminations that had passed, or were passing, through the mind of either Jock Huie or his wife Eppie concerning their daughter Baubie; but Jock, honest man, had just left his cottage in the grey gloamin to go to the smiddy and get his tramp-pick sharpened with the view of resuming work next day in full vigour, when Baubie dressed in her Sunday garments, and carrying a small bundle, entered. There was a brief pause; and then Baubie's mother, in a distinct and very deliberate tone, said—

"Weel, Baubie, 'oman; an' *ye're* here neist."

At these words, Baubie, who had just laid aside her bundle, threw herself down beside it, on the top of the family "deece," with the remark,

"Ay; faur ither wud aw gae?"

And then she proceeded silently to untie the strings of her bonnet. Neither Baubie nor her mother was extremely agitated, but there was a certain measure of restrained feeling operating upon both the one and the other. The mother felt that a faithful discharge of the maternal duty demanded that she should give utterance to a reproof as severe as she could properly frame, accompanied by reproaches, bearing on the special wickedness and ingratitude of the daughter; and, on the part of the daughter along with a vague sense of the fitness of all this, in a general way, there were indications of a volcanic state of temper, which might burst out with considerable, if misplaced fierceness, on comparatively slight provocation. And wherefore create a scene of verbal violence; for deep down, below those irascible feelings, did there not lurk in Eppie Huie's bosom a kind of latent sense that if such crises as that which had now emerged were not to be regarded as absolutely certain, they were assuredly to be looked upon as very much in the nature of events inevitable in the ordinary history of the family? And thus it was that Eppie Huie, virtually accepting the situation as part of the common lot, went no further than a

general rasping away at details, and the consequences arising out of the main fact.

"Weel, weel, Baubie, 'oman, ye 've begun to gae the aul' gate in braw time—ye 'll fin't a hard road to yersel', as weel 's to them 't 's near conneckit wi' you. Fat gar't ye keep oot o' yer fader's sicht at the market—haudin 'im gyaun like a wull stirk seekin' ye, an' makin' a feel o' 'im?"

"Aw 'm seer ye needna speer that—'s gin ye hedna kent to tell 'im yersel'."

"That 's a bonnie story to set up noo, ye limmer—that I sud say the like," said Eppie with some heat. "Didnin ye deny 't i' my face the vera last time that ye was here?"

"H-mph! an' aw daursay ye believ't 's!"

"Weel, Baubie, 'oman, it 's a sair say 't we sud be forc't to tak' for a muckle black lee fat 's been threepit, an' yea-threepit i' oor witters b' them that 's sibbest till 's."

To this observation Baubie made no reply: and after a short silence Eppie Huie continued in a dreary monotone—

"Ay, ay! An' this is fat folk gets for toilin' themsel's to deith feshin up a faimily! There 's little aneuch o' peace or rest for 's till oor heid be aneth the green sod—jist oot o' ae tribble in till anither. Little did I or yer peer fader think short syne that *ye* was to be hame to be a burden till 's."

"Aw ha'ena been a burden yet ony wye," said Baubie with some sharpness, "ye needna be sae ready speakin' that gate."

To this retort Eppie Huie made some reply to the effect that others similarly circumstanced had uttered such brave words, and that time would tell in Baubie's case as it had told in theirs. She then rose and put some water in a small pot, which she hung upon the "crook" over the turf fire, in the light of which Baubie and she had hitherto sat.

"Fa 's the fader o' 't than?" said Eppie Huie, as she turned about from completing the operation just mentioned; but though the words were uttered in a very distinct as well as abrupt tone, there was no answer till she repeated her question in the form of a sharp "Aw 'm sayin'?"

"Ye 'll ken that a-time aneuch," answered Baubie.

"Ken 't a-time aneuch!—an' you here"—

"Ay an' me here—an' fat aboot it? *It* winna be here the morn, nor yet the morn's morn," said Baubie in a harder and more reckless tone than she had yet assumed.

Eppie Huie had, no doubt, a sense of being baffled, more or less. She resumed her seat, uttering as she did so, something between a sigh and a groan. There was nothing more said until the water in the little pot having now got to "the boil," Eppie rose, and lighting the rush wick in the little black lamp that hung on the shoulder of the "swye" from which the crook depended, proceeded to "mak' the sowens." When the lamp had been lighted, Baubie rose from her place on the deece, and lifting her bonnet, which now lay beside her, and her bundle, said,

"Aw 'm gyaun awa' to my bed."

"Ye better wyte an' get yer sipper—the sowens 'll be ready eenoo."

"Aw 'm nae wuntin' nae sipper," said Baubie, turning to go as she spoke. "There 's nae things lyin' i' the mid-hoose bed, is there?"

"Naething; oonless it be the muckle basket, wi' some o' yer breeders' half-dry't claes. Tak' that bit fir i' yer han'—ye 'll need it, ony wye, to lat ye see to haud aff o' the tubs an' the backet."

And Baubie went off to bed forthwith, notwithstanding a sort of second invitation, as she was lighting the fir, to wait for some supper. I rather think that after all she did not relish the comparative light so much as

the comparative darkness. And then if she stayed to get even the first practicable mouthful of "sowens," was there not considerable risk that Jock Huie, her father, might drop in upon her on his return from the smiddy? Not that Baubie had an unreasonably sensitive dread of facing her father. But having now got over what she would have called "the warst o' 't," with her mother, she felt that her mother, being on the whole so well "posted up," might be left with advantage to break the ice, at least, to the old man.

When Jock Huie returned from the smiddy that evening, an event that happened in about half an hour after his daughter Baubie had gone to bed, he seemed to be moody, and in a measure out of temper. He put aside his bonnet, and sat down in his usual corner, while Eppie set the small table for his supper, only one or two remarks of a very commonplace sort having been made up to that point.

"Ye'll better say awa', man; they've been made this file," said Eppie, as she lifted the dish with the "sowens" to the table from the hearthstone, where it had been placed in order to retain warmth in the mess.

"Aw'm sayin', 'oman," quoth Jock, apparently oblivious to his wife's invitation, "div ye ken onything about that jaud Baubie—there's something or anither nae richt, ere she wud haud oot o' fowk's road this gate?"

"Baubie's *here*, man," said Eppie Huie; and the brevity of her speech was more than made up by the significance of the words and the tone in which they were uttered.

"Here?" exclaimed Jock in a tone of inquiry, and looking towards his wife as he spoke.

"She's till 'er bed i' the mid-hoose," said Eppie in reply; and, perceiving that Jock's look was only half answered, she added, "Aw daursay she wasna owre fain to see you."

"Fat!" cried Jock, "she'll be wi' a geet to some chiel, is she?"

"Ou ye needna speer," said Eppie in a tone of "dowie" resignation.

"Weel, that does cowe the gowan—a quine o' little mair nor nineteen! But aw mith 'a been seer o' 't. It wasna for naething that she was playin' hide-an'-seek wi' me yon gate. Brawlie kent I that she was i' the market wi' a set o' them. Deil speed them a', weel-a-wat!"

Jock Huie was not a model man exactly in point of moral sentiment; neither was he a man of keen sensibility. But he did nevertheless possess a certain capability of sincere, if it might be uncultured feeling; and he now placed his rough, weather-beaten face against the horny palms of his two hands, and, resting his two elbows on his knees, gave utterance to a prolonged "Hoch-hey?" Jock maintained this attitude for sometime, and probably would have maintained it a good deal longer, but for the practical view of matters taken by his wife, and the practical advice urgently pressed upon him by her when her patience had got exhausted:—

"Aw'm sayin', man, ye needna connach yer sipper; that'll dee nae gweed to nachody.—Tak' your sowens! Ye're lattin them grow stiff wi' caul', for a' the tribble 't aw was at keepin' them het to you."

Thus admonished, Jock Huie took his supper in silence; and, thereafter, with little more talk beyond one or two questions from Jock of a like nature with those which had been so ineffectually addressed to Baubie by her mother, the husband and wife retired to bed.

CHAPTER III.

THE GEET'S ADVENT—INITIAL DIFFICULTIES IN ACQUIRING AN ECCLESIASTICAL STATUS.

That Jock Huie's daughter, Baubie, had returned home to her father and mother was a fact about which there could be no manner of doubt or equivocation; as to the cause of Baubie's return, there was a general concurrence of opinion in the neighbourhood; indeed, it had been a point settled long before, among elderly and sagacious females who knew her, that Baubie would speedily appear in her true colours. Yet were there a few of this same class of people in whose sides Baubie was still somewhat of a thorn. For when the first few days were over after her return, so far from shrinking out of their sight, Baubie flung herself across their path at the most unexpected times, and exhibited an unmistakeable readiness to meet their friendly criticisms with a prompt retort. Or was it a staring personal scrutiny —well, Baubie was almost ostentatiously ready to stand that ordeal, and stare with the best of her starers in return. Baubie was perfectly able to take care of herself, and if a young woman of her spirit chose to remain six months out of the "hire house," whose business was that but her own? Baubie would like to know that.

It is not to be supposed that this bravado went far in the way of deceiving any but very inexperienced people, if it deceived even them, which is more than doubtful. And in the nature of the case, it would at any rate deceive no one very long.

It was just at Candlemas when it was reported that Jock Huie had become a grandfather; a genealogical dignity the attainment of which did not seem to excite in Jock's breast any particular feeling of elation. Such an idea as that of apprehension lest the line of Huies in his branch should become extinct had certainly never troubled Jock to the extent that would have made him anxious to welcome a grandchild, legitimate or illegitimate; and the belief that this particular bairn was born to be a direct and positive burden upon him hardly tended to make its advent either auspicious or cheering. Jock knew full well the "tyauve" he had had in bringing up his own family proper; and now, ere the obstreperous squalling of the younger of them was well out of his ears, why here was another sample of the race, ready to renew and continue all that turmoil and uproar, by night and by day, from which his small hut had never been free for a good twenty years of his lifetime.

"An' it's a laddie, ye say, that the quine Huie's gotten?"

"A laddie; an' a-wat a richt pratty gate-farrin bairnie 's ever ye saw wi' yer twa een."

"Fan cam' 't hame no?"

"It was jist the streen, nae langer gane. Aifter 't was weel gloam't, I hears a chap at the window, an' fa sud this be but Eppie 'ersel', peer creatur. I pat my tartan shawl aboot my heid immedantly, an' aifter tellin' the littleans to keep weel ootbye fae the fire, an' biddin' their sister pit them to their beds shortly, I crap my wa's roun' as fest 's aw cud. Jock was nae lang come hame fae 's day's wark, an' was sittin' i' the neuk at 's bit sipper. 'He 's jist makin' ready to gae for Mrs. Slorach,' says she. Awat I was rael ill-pay't for 'im, peer stock, tir't aneuch nae doot, jist aff o' a sair day's wark. It was a freely iimmas nicht, wi' byous coorse ploiteric road; an' it 's three mile gweed,

but I can asseer ye Jock hed gane weel, for it wasna muckle passin' twa oors fan he 's back an' Mrs. Slorach wi' 'im."

"Weel, weel, Jock 'll get 's nain o' 't lickly, honest man. It 'll be a won'er an' they hinna the tsil' to fesh up."

"Ou weel-a-wat that 's true aneuch; but there 's never a hicht but there 's a howe at the boddom o' 't, as I said to Eppie fan she first taul' me o' Baubie's misfortune; an' there 's never a mou' sen' but the maet 's sen' wi' 't."

"Div they ken yet fa 's the fader o' the creatur?"

"Weel, she hed been unco stubborn aboot it no; but aw 'm thinkin' she hed taul' 'er mither at the lang len'th. At a roch guess, a body mith gae farrer agley, aw daursay, nor licken 't to ane o' yon chiels 't was aboot the toon wi' 'er at Briggies'—yon skyeow-fittet breet."

The foregoing brief extract from the conversation of a couple of those kindly gossips who had all along taken a special interest in her case will indicate with sufficient distinctness the facts surrounding the birth of Baubie Huie's Geet.

The reputed father of the geet was a sort of nondescript chap, whose habit it was to figure at one time as an indifferent second or third "horseman," and next time as an "orra man"; a bullet-headed bumpkin, with big unshapely feet, spreading considerably outward as he walked; a decided taste for smoking tobacco; of somewhat more than average capability in talking bucolic slang of a gross sort; yet possessing withal a comfortable estimate of his own graces of person and manner in the eyes of the fair sex. Such was the—sweetheart, shall we say?—of Baubie Huie.

How one might best define the precise relationship existing between the nondescript chiel and Baubie, it would not be easy to say. It was believed that on the feeing market night he had taken Baubie home to

Briggies', he being not greatly the worse of drink, and that on the term night he had accompanied her part of the way toward her father's house. There was also a sort of vague impression that he had since then come once or twice to visit Baubie, keeping as well out of sight and ken of Jock Huie and his wife as might be. Be that as it may, now that the child was born, Jock, who was very much of a practical man, desired to know articulately from the man himself whether he was to "tak' wi''t an' pay for't. The idea of asking whether the fellow had any intention of doing the one thing which a man with a shred of honour about him would have felt bound to do in the circumstances —viz., marrying his daughter—had really not occurred to Jock Huie. And so it came to pass, that after a certain amount of rather irritating discussion between himself and the female members of his family, and as the nondescript took very good care not to come to him, Jock "took road" to hunt up the nondescript, who, as he discovered after some trouble, was now serving on a farm some five or six miles off. He found him as third horseman at the plough in a field of "neep-reet," along with his two fellow ploughmen. The nondescript had a sufficient aspect of embarrassment when Jock Huie caught him up at the end rig, where he had been waiting till the ploughs should come out, to indicate that he would not have been disappointed had the visit been omitted; and it seemed not improbable that his two companions might thereafter offer one or two interrogatory remarks on the subject, which would not be a great deal more welcome. At anyrate, Jock Huie had the satisfaction of finding that the nondescript "wasna seekin' to deny't;" nay, that he did not refuse to "pay for't," any backwardness on his part in that respect up to the date of visit, being readily accounted for by the fact that it was the middle of the half year, when a man was naturally run of cash. Threats about "'reestin waages," therefore, were perfectly uncalled-

for; and, indeed, a sort of unjust aspersion on the general character of the nondescript. It was right that Jock Huie should know that.

"Ye sud hae the civeelity to lat fowk ken faur ye are than; an' ye think ony ill o' that. Bonnie story to haud me trailin' here, lossin half a day seekin' ye'," retorted Jock with some roughness of tone.

Between the date of Jock Huie's visit just mentioned and the term of Whitsunday, the father of Baubie Huie's geet visited the abode of the Huies once at any-rate; and in course of the conference that ensued, it so happened that the subject of getting the geet christened came up—the needful preliminary to that being, as Jock explained, to appear and give satisfaction to that grave Church Court, the Kirk-Session. This was a point which both the paternal and maternal Huie were a good deal more eager to discuss and settle about than either of the immediate parents of the geet. Indeed, the nondescript seemed penetrated with a sort of feeling that that was a part of the business hardly in his line. Not that he objected on principle to the geet being christened; far from it; for when Eppie Huie had stated the necessity of getting themselves "clear't," and having that rite performed, and Jock Huie had vigorously backed up her statement, the nondescript assented with a perfectly explicit "Ou ay;" only he showed a decided tendency always to let the matter drop again. This did not suit Jock Huie's book in the least, however, and he manifested a determination to have the business followed out that was not at all comfortable to the nondescript.

When the nondescript had pondered over the situation for a few days, and all along with the feeling that something must really be done, for he did not in the least relish the idea of further calls from Jock Huie, the happy thought occurred to him of calling on his old master, Briggies, who was one of the elders of the Kirk, and, being after all a humane man, would no doubt be

prevailed upon to pave the way for him and Baubie making penitential appearance before the session, and receiving censure and "absolution." So he called on Briggies, and was rather drily told that, neither Baubie nor he being "communicants," apart from the censure of the session, which had to be encountered in the first place, he, at anyrate, "as the engaging parent," (and perhaps Baubie too), would have to undergo an examination, at the hands of the minister, as to his knowledge of the cardinal doctrines of the Christian faith, and the significance of the rite of baptism in particular.

"Fat wye cud ye expeck to win throw itherweese, min?" Briggies felt bound to speak as an elder in this case—"Gin fowk winna learn to behave themsel's they maun jist stan' the consequences. The vera Kirk-Session itsel' cudna relieve ye, man, upo' nae ither precunnance."

The nondescript returned much pondering on this disheartening information, which he got opportunity, by and bye, of communicating to Baubie. In private conference, the two agreed that "a scaulin' fae the session," by itself—a thing they had been both accustomed to hear spoken of with extreme jocularity, not less than they had seen those who had undergone the same, regarded as possessing something of the heroism that is rather to be envied—a scaulin' fae the session might well be borne; but to stand a formal examination before the minister in cold blood was another affair. The dilemma having occurred, the two horns were presented to Jock Huie, who was so relentlessly forcing them on to impalement, in the hope of softening his heart, or at anyrate awakening his sympathy; but Jock was just as determined as ever that they must go forward in the performance of their Christian duty, and his one reply was, "Ou, deil care; ye maun jist haud at the Catechis."

CHAPTER IV.

THE GEET'S STATUS, ECCLESIASTICAL AND SOCIAL, DEFINED.

"Aw 'm sayin', 'oman, that geet maun be kirsen't some wye or anither; we canna lat the creatur grow up like a haethen."

The speaker in this case was Jock Huie, and the person addressed his wife Eppie. It was a fine Saturday evening toward the latter end of June, and Jock who had got home from his work at the close of the week, was now in a deliberative mood.

"Weel, man, ye'll need to see fat wye 't's to be manag't," was Eppie's reply.

"They 'll jist need 'o tak' her 'er leen; that's a' that I can say aboot it," said Jock.

"Ah-wa, man; aw won'er to hear ye speak."

"Weel fat else can ye dee? Aw tell ye the littlean 'll be made a moniment o' i' the kwintra side."

"Ou, weel, ye maun jist gae to the minaister yersel', man, an' tell 'im fat gate her an' huz tee 's been guidet; he 's a rael sympatheesin person, an' there 's nae doot he 'll owreleuk onything as far 's he can."

"Sorra set 'im, weel-a-wat!" said Jock Huie emphatically, as he knocked the half-burnt "dottal" of tobacco out of his pipe into the palm of his hand, with a sort of savage thump.

Whether Jock Huie's portentous objurgation on the subject of the Catechism had much or anything to do with the result it would perhaps be difficult to say, but it was a simple matter of fact that after it had been uttered, the father of Baubie's geet exhibited

even more than previously a disposition to fight shy of the path of duty on which Jock sought to impel him. The Whitsunday term was drawing on; the Whitsunday term had arrived and the geet still unchristened. Then it was found that the father of the geet had deemed it an expedient thing to seek an appreciable change of air by "flittin'" entirely beyond "kent bounds." True it was, that on the very eve of his departure he had by the hands of a third party transmitted to Baubie for the maintenance of her geet a "paper note" of the value of one pound, and along with it a verbal message to the effect that he was "gyaun to the pairis' o' Birse"; but as it had been a not infrequent practice among the witty to mention the parish named as a sort of mythical region to which one might be condemned to go, for whom no other sublunary use was apparent, Baubie herself was far from assured that the literal Birse was meant; and we may add was equally at a loss as to whether she had further remittances to look for, or if the note was a once and single payment, in full discharge of the nondescript's obligations in respect to the present maintenance, and prospective upbringing of his son—the Bastard Geet.

Baubie Huie's Bastard Geet had now reached the age of fully four months; no wonder if the grand-paternal anxieties should be aroused as to the danger of the "peer innocent" merging into heathenism and becoming a bye-word to the parish. And as Jock Huie had expressed his sense of the importance of kirsenin as a preventative, so after all, it fell to Jock's lot to take the responsible part in getting the rite performed. The name was a matter of difficulty; had there been an available father, it would have been his duty to confer with the mother on the point, and be fully instructed what name to bestow on the infant; and in the case of his own children, the male part of them at anyrate, Jock Huie had never been much at a loss about the names. Among his sons, Tam, Sawney, and Jock, came in, in orderly succession; but, ponder as he would,

the naming of Baubie's geet puzzled him long. Its reputed father bore the name of Samuel—cut down to Samie—Caie, and Jock rejected promptly and with scorn the suggestion, coming from its mother, to inflict upon the bairn any such name, which he, in strong language, declared to be nauseous enough to serve as an emetic to a dog. Indeed, Jock's honest hatred of the nondescript had now reached a pitch that made him resolutely decline to pronounce his name at all; a practice in which, as a rule, he was tacitly imitated by his wife and daughter. Partly from this cause, and partly by reason of the still further delay that occurred in getting the christening over, it came to pass that the poor youngster began to have attached to it, with a sort of permanency, the title of Baubie Huie's Bastard Geet; and when at last the parson had done the official duty in question, and Jock Huie, with a just sense of his position in the matter, had boldly named the bairn after himself, it only led to the idle youth of the neighbourhood ringing the changes on the geet in this fashion—

> Aul' Jock, an' young Jock, an' Jock comin' tee;
> There 'll never be a gweed Jock till aul' Jock dee.

But notwithstanding of all these things the geet throve and grew as only a sturdy scion of humanity could be expected to do.

To say that Baubie Huie was passionately attached to her child, would perhaps be rather an over-statement; yet was she pleased to nurse the poor geet with a fair amount of kindness; and physically the geet seemed to make no ungrateful return. It was edifying to note the bearing of the different members of the family towards the geet. The practical interest taken in its spiritual welfare by old Jock Huie has been mentioned; and despite the trouble it had caused him, Jock was equally prepared now to let the geet have the first and tenderest "bite" from his hard-won daily crust to meet its temporal wants; a measure of self-denial such as many a philanthropist of higher station and greater pretensions has never set before himself. The nature

of Eppie Huie's feelings toward the geet was sufficiently indicated by the skilled and careful nursing she would expend upon it at those times when Baubie, tired of her charge, with an unceremonious—"Hae, tak' 'im a file, mither,"—would hand over the geet "body bulk" to the charge of its grannie. When any of Jock Huie's grown-up sons happened to visit home, their cue was simply to ignore the geet altogether. Even when it squalled the loudest they would endeavour to retain the appearance of stolid obliviousness of its presence; just as they did when the hapless geet crowed and "walloped" its small limbs in the superabundance of its joy at being allowed the novel pleasure of gazing at them. The members of the family who were Baubie's juniors, did not profess indifference; only their feeling toward the geet, when it came under their notice on these temporary visits home, was in the main the reverse of amicable. Her younger sister, indeed, in Baubie's hearing, designated the unoffending geet a "nasty brat," whereat Baubie flared up hotly and reminded her that it was not so very long since she, the sister, was an equally "nasty brat," to say the very least of it; as she, Baubie, could very well testify from ample experience of the degrading office of nurse to her. "Fat ever 't be, ye may haud yer chat ony wye," said Baubie, and the sister stood rebuked.

When harvest came, the geet being now six months old, was "spean't," and Baubie "took a hairst." Handed over to the exclusive custody of its grannie for the time being, the geet was destined thenceforth to share both bed and board, literally, with Eppie Huie and Jock her husband. The tail of the speaning process when the geet got "fretty," and especially overnight, brought back to Jock Huie a lively remembrance of by-gone experiences of a like nature; and he once or twice rather strongly protested against the conduct of "that ablich" in "brakin' 's nicht's rest" with its outcries. But, on the whole, Jock bore with the geet wonderfully.

When her hairst was finished, it was Baubie's luck

to get continuous employment from the same master till Martinmas. When that period had arrived, Baubie, of her own free will and choice, again stood the feeing market, and found what she deemed a suitable engagement at a large farm several miles off, whither she went in due time ; and where, as was to be expected, she found the domestic supervision of the male and female servants less stringent on the whole than it had been at the elder's at Brigfit. In so far as her very moderate wages allowed, after meeting her own needs in the matter of dress, Baubie Huie was not altogether disinclined to contribute toward the support of her bastard geet. As a matter of course, nothing further was heard of or from the nondescript father of the geet. He had moved sufficiently far off to be well out of sight at any rate, and Jock Huie had no means of finding him out and pressing the claim against him in respect of the child's maintenance, except by means of the Poor Law Inspector ; and Jock, being a man of independent spirit, had not yet thought of calling in the services of the "Boord." As time went on, Baubie's maternal care did not manifest itself in an increasing measure in this particular of furnishing the means to support the geet more than it did in any other respect affecting her offspring.

After one or two more flittings from one situation to another, it became known that Baubie Huie was about to be married. At another Martinmas term—there had been an interval of two years—Baubie once more returned home ; but this time frankly to announce to Jock and Eppie Huie that she was "gyaun to be mairriet" to one Peter Ga', who had been a fellow-servant with her during a recent half-year. From considerate regard for the convenience of her parents, and other causes, the happy day would not be delayed beyond a fortnight ; and there would be no extensive "splore" on the occasion, to disturb materially the domestic arrangements of the Huies.

On this latter point certain of the neighbours were keenly disappointed. Because there were no marriage

rejoicings to speak of, they missed an invitation to join in the same, and they spoke in this wise :—

"An' there's to be nae mairriage ava, ye was sayin' ?"

"Hoot—fat wye cud there ? The bridegreem an aul' widow man't mith be 'er fader, wi' three-four o' a faimily."

"Na, sirs ; a bonny bargaine she 'll be to the like o' 'im—three or four o' a faimily, ye say ?"

"So aw b'lieve ; an' aw doot it winna be lang ere Baubie gi'e 'im ane mair to haud it haill wi'."

"Weel, weel ! Only fat ither cud ye expeck ; but the man maun hae been sair misguidet 't loot 's een see the like o' 'er."

"An' ye may say 't."

"Fat siclike o' a creatur is he, ken ye ?"

"Ou weel, he's a byous quate man it wud appear, an' a gweed aneuch servan', but sair haud'n doon naitrally. Only the peer stock maun be willin' to dee the richt gate in a menner, or he wud a never propos't mairryin Baubie."

"Gweed pity 'im wi' the like o' 'er, weel-a-wat—senseless cuttie."

Naturally, and by right, when Baubie Huie had got a home of her own, she ought to have resumed the custody of her Bastard Geet, now a "gangrel bairn" of fully two years ; but on the one hand, it was evident that Mr. and Mrs. Ga' had the prospect of finding the available accommodation in a hut, whose dimensions afforded scope for only a very limited but and ben, sufficiently occupied by and bye without the geet ; and on the other, Eppie Huie, though abundantly forfough'en for a woman of her years in keeping her house, attending to the wants of her husband, Jock, and meeting such demands as her own family made upon her exertions as general washerwoman, would have rather demurred to parting with the geet, to whom she had become, as far as the adverse circumstances of the case allowed, attached. And thus the geet was left in the undisputed possession of Jock and Eppie Huie, to be trained by them as they saw meet.

Unlucky geet, say you? Well, one is not altogether disposed to admit that without some qualification. Sure enough, Jock Huie, senior, would and did permit Baubie's geet to grow up an uncouth, unkempt, and, in the main, untaught bairn; yet was there from him, even, a sort of genuine, if somewhat rugged affection, flowing out toward little Jock Huie (as the geet was alternatively styled); as when he would dab the shaving brush playfully against the geet's unwhiskered cheek, while sternly refusing him a grip of the gleaming razor, as he lifted the instrument upward for service on his own face; or, at another time, would quench the geet's aspiration after the garments of adult life, manifested in its having managed to thrust its puny arms into a huge sleeved moleskin vest belonging to Jock himself, by dropping his big "wyv'n bonnet" over the toddling creature's head, and down to his shoulders. Bitter memories of Samie Caie had faded into indistinctness more or less. And when the neighbour wives, as they saw the geet with an old black "cutty" in his hand, gravely attempting to set the contents of the same alight with a fiery sod in imitation of its grandfather, would exclaim, admiringly, "Na, but that laddie is a bricht Huie, Jock, man," Jock would feel a sort of positive pride in the youngster, who bade so fairly to do credit to his upbringing.

No; it might be that meagre fare—meagre even to pinching at times—was what the inmates of Jock Huie's cot had to expect: it might be that in a moral and intellectual point of view the nourishment going was correspondingly scanty and insufficient, to say the least of it; but in being merely left to grow up under these negatively unfavourable conditions, a grotesque miniature copy of the old man at whose heels he had learnt to toddle about with such assiduity, I can by no means admit that, as compared with many and many a geet whose destiny it is to come into the world in the like irregular fashion, the lot of Baubie Huie's Bastard Geet could be justly termed unlucky.

GLENGILLODRAM.

THE CATTLE SHOW.

It is not the great annual gathering of the Royal Agricultural Society of England, nor that of the Highland and Agricultural Society of Scotland, that I intend to describe. My task shall be the humbler one of introducing the reader to the yearly doings of a parish Agricultural Society in the far north of Scotland, when its members are met to exhibit their stock. But let it not be supposed that my parish society is an unimportant institution, considered by itself, or in relation to its place in the framework of British "interests." For if we single out the three counties of Aberdeen, Banff, and Moray, in the region of which I have just spoken, we shall find that the great metropolis of England draws from thence a surprisingly large proportion of the finest fat beeves that are week by week sold at Islington. And it is at the parish cattle show that those very beeves, which will by-and-bye come up to London at Christmas in scores and hundreds, with glossy sides shaking with fat, are first drawn out and pitted against each other for the honours of the prize list.

Here, then, on a fine summer day, the young oxen, cows, and heifers are being driven from all quarters of the Glen, in groups of three, four, five, six, and eight, with here and there a refractory animal tugged and pushed along with a rope halter over its head. And the bulls have the distinction of wearing each a ring in

his nose, and of having each a special attendant to himself. They converge towards a large open field of stunted grass, with heather and broom about its margin. In the lower part are sundry wooden and canvas booths, the occupants of which profess to supply "refreshment for man and beast," and about these we find a miscellaneous gathering of horses, sheep-dogs, and vehicles of various descriptions.

The cattle have passed on a little further, and my friend drags me forward to see them; for, he adds, "The judging has begun." We go on toward the upper part of the field, which is a scene of rather uncomfortable liveliness, by reason of the number of animals congregated there—about two hundred I am told; and, as every farmer endeavours to keep his own small group separate from all the others, the amount of shouting, bellowing, and spasmodic running hither and thither of men and cattle is immense. They have just driven about a dozen animals into a sort of double pen. These I learn are the "two-year-old heifers," which are about to come under the judges' inspection. The space inside the ring is appropriated to the cattle whose merits are under adjudication, the judges, and a few other officials, or privileged persons. Hanging on by, and outside of the fence, are a good many scores of spectators, all deeply interested, evidently, in the awards of the judges. These same judges are three shrewd-looking men, farmers or cattle-dealers, but not men of the parish, lest their decisions should be partial. Along with them are a rustic clerk, to record their "findings," and two or three men with sticks, punching about the cattle for the convenience of the judges. And inside the fence, too, coming and going, are various gentlemen of consideration in the place, one or two of them dressed in the Highland garb. The judges seem to do their work conscientiously. First, they give a brief glance at the lot in general; then they pick out and put to one side a number of the best; next, they com-

pare the "points" of these, turn them round and round for careful scrutiny, and anon draw aside to consult together.

At last the order of prizes is called out, and jotted down by the clerk; the gate is opened, and the two-year-old heifers are driven out, to be succeeded in the pen by the "one-year-old heifers," gathered from different parts of the field with no little noise and scampering. And so it is with the "two-year-old stots," the "one-year-old stots," and various other classes. I have no doubt the judges do their work with thorough knowledge and impartiality, as indeed the dozens of amateur judges around me seem ready to admit, though I am too great a novice to be able to discern with any approach to exactitude the grounds of their various awards. I do not know that in this I am entirely singular either; for here when a new lot is driven into the pen, I overhear one of the kilted gentlemen—the greatest laird in the parish, who smokes a clay cutty, chats familiarly with his tenants, and seems to take a lively interest in all that is going on—directing the very favourable attention of the judges to a showy-looking, speckled cow as an animal of extraordinary merit. These hard-headed gentlemen simply smile an unbelieving smile; and I watch how they will deal with this particular animal, which seems to me also a beast of uncommon merit, judging by her giraffe-like height, and the beautiful speckling all over her body. Alas for amateur opinion, they are not even at the trouble to turn her aside for a moment's inspection; and though the stentorian attendant calls out six or seven prizes to cows, the speckled cow is not admitted to even the lowest place in the list!

After all the "general classes" have been gone over, there comes a special competition. There are a couple of silver "challenge cups" to be competed for; one for the "best male," the other for the "best female breeding animal on the ground." And here both the

interest and excitement awakened by the day's proceedings culminate. The man who would make the challenge cup his own must take it three years running against all competitors; and the difficult nature of this feat finds illustration in the fact that nobody has ever yet succeeded in accomplishing it. On the present occasion, I can perceive, the competition runs some risk of tending to a war of races. For the male cup a selection of bulls, old and young, pawing the earth and breathing out fierce threats against each other, are brought into the ring; and after much consultation, a young, but, as one can understand, very handsome short-horned bull is declared entitled to the high award; whereupon sundry of the amateur judges around me mutter very audible doubts about the equity of the decision. The region in which we are is rather famous for the production of that variety of the bovine race known as "black polled," which, when fully "finished," stands at the very top of the London butchers' price-lists under the title of "prime Scots." And the idea that any other than a black-polled animal should carry off one of the chief honours of the day does not command the popular sympathy. However the equilibrium of feeling is pretty well restored when it is announced that the cup for females has been carried off easily from a large lot of competitors of divers breeds by a polled cow of "uncommon sweetness," as my friend assures me.

The "labours of the field" fairly over, and certain adjustments about payment of prize-money made, the next part of the day's proceedings is the dinner, which takes place in the largest of the canvas booths already spoken of, the inn, near by, not affording accommodation for a company of sixty to seventy, such as is now assembled. The kilted laird is chairman; his *vis-à-vis*, or "croupier," is a very hale-looking man of Herculean build, not under seventy years of age; and who, from the designation I hear applied to him on all hands of the "el'er," I understand to be a representative within the parish of the lay element in the Presbyterian kirk.

On the chairman's right sits the parson of the parish; a comfortable, sedate-looking man, with ruddy cheeks and bald head, who has not deemed it beneath his dignity to enter the lists with his parishioners, and has honourably gained two or three prizes at the show. To the left of the chairman are the judges; and the rest of the company take their places without any regard to precedence. The toast list, as one discovers by-and-bye, is a paper of portentous length, enumerating well nigh thirty separate "sentiments" from "The Queen" downward; but luckily the speeches are brief; for, when the gentlemen of the Glengillodram Agricultural Society get on their legs, their otherwise copious power of talk seems notably to desert them. The one really set or effective speech is when, in reply to the toast of "The Clergy and the Rev. Dr. Bluebell," the Rev. Dr. Bluebell proceeds to vindicate the propriety of his appearance there and then amongst his parishioners; and how it becomes a true pastor to be interested in all that concerns the prosperity of his flock, to illustrate and make clear the truth that they, the natural, and he and his order, the spiritual husbandmen, are united by a common nature, common sympathies, and common wants, and thus are bound to seek each other's welfare in every possible way. The elder, as his present office demands of him to do, cries "Hear, hear," and the company cry "Hear, hear," and applaud the Rev. Dr. Bluebell loudly. When the chairman toasts "The Judges," they applaud again; when he toasts "The Successful Competitors," they also applaud; and when he toasts "The Unsuccessful Competitors," they applaud, if possible, yet more lustily. And it is observable that at every succeeding pause between the toasts, the general hum of conversation is getting louder, and more and more animated.

Then the silver challenge cups are brought in, and with due ceremony presented by the chairman to the winners, who turn out to be no other than the elder,

and a remarkably jolly-looking farmer from the upper part of the Glen, with a big red nose, and clad in a suit of "hodden grey." The chairman is now evidently getting tired of speech-making; and he begs to inform the company that when the Rev. Dr. Bluebell has given a toast he will call on the croupier for a song. The parson rises, and after a somewhat prosy and meaningless exordium, as it seems to me, proceeds to propose as his toast "The Strangers Present." And, adds the Rev. Doctor, to my unspeakable amazement and horror, "let me join with the toast the name of a gentleman, with whom I have not the pleasure of personal acquaintance—a representative of the smallware and pearl button department of trade, I understand—Mr. Simon Jellycod, your health, sir." All eyes are directed towards me, some dozens of broad, good-natured countenances grin at me, as many shaggy heads nod over me; and it is a positive relief when one burly fellow, rather more than half seas over, fraternally seizes my hand with a hiccuped "Gi'e 's your neive, min," as they madly "hip-hip-hurrah" all round. How I manage to get to my feet, and actually to speak for full five minutes, as my guide, philospher, and friend afterwards assures me, I do, remains to me still a complete mystery.

My speech, like all things human, takes end at last and somehow; and then comes the elder's song; which, as it has in it a touch of the spirit of the old Scottish lyric, and to me at least is quite new, I here reproduce:

BONNY BALCAIRN.

There lives an auld man at the back o' yon knowes,
His legs are nae better nor auld owsen bows,
It would set him far better to be herdin' his yowes,
Than takin' the tackie o' bonny Balcairn.
Whilk o' ye lasses will gang to Balcairn,
Oh whilk o' ye lasses will gang to Balcairn,
Oh whilk o' ye lasses will gang to Balcairn,
To be the goodwife o' bonny Balcairn.

I'm nae for the lass that has naething ava,
Nor yet for the lassie that speaks for it a',
Nor yet for the lassie that girns an' flytes,
An' blames her goodman fan it 's a' her ain wytes.
Whilk o' ye lasses, &c.

I 'm nae for the lass wi' the bonny black locks,
Nor yet for the lass wi' the braw ribbon knots,
But I 'm for the lass wi' the bonny bank notes,
They will help wi' the tackie o' bonny Balcairn.
Whilk o' ye lasses, &c.

"Oh, mither, I 'm gaen to Laurence fair."
"Daft laddie, fat are ye gaen to dee there?"
"I 'm gaen to buy some harrows an' plows,
To streek a bit pleuchie on Balcairn's knowes."
Whilk o' ye lasses, &c.

"Oh, mither, I 'm gaen to Laurence fair."
"Daft lassie, fat are ye gaen to dee there?"
"I 'm gaen to buy some ribbons and lawn,
To wear on my head fan I get the goodman.
For I am the lassie that 's gaen to Balcairn,
I am the lassie that 's gaen to Balcairn,
Although the auld man be a silly concern,
It 's a canty bit tackie the tack o' Balcairn."

"Your health an' song, el'er"—"your health an' song," alternate with shouts of applause when the song terminates. Then the Rev. Dr. Bluebell and a few of the straiter sort in the company leave; then we have one or two more attempts at toast-giving and song-singing. But the company are getting gradually more uproarious and less manageable, till at last the chairman sternly calls for "order," to allow of his finishing the toast list, which is done by drinking to "A Good Harvest."

The company have now dispersed, as I innocently suppose, and my friend and I are setting out for his home, when the elder seizes him by the arm, and says, "Hoot, ye 're nae gaen awa wi' the gentleman till he see the cups kirsen't." It is in vain to urge that I have seen, perhaps, quite enough of the convivialities of the place for the time. We are pulled away toward the

inn, and on our way thither the elder seems to be mustering his friends to take part in the ceremony that is about to follow, whatever it may be. Of that we are not left long in doubt. On entering mine host's largest parlour, which is evidently set out for the occasion, there stand the two veritable challenge cups—silver cups of ample size, though not of the highest finish—at the top of the table, and beside them a goodly array of bottles corked and sealed. Gradually a company of about half the number of that which has just broken up has assembled. That the proceedings are to be more of the free-and-easy order than those that have gone before is testified by the fact that the greater part of those who come in enter the room smoking their pipes; and in this particular the chairman, who is none other than the worthy laird who had officiated in that capacity just before, is no exception. When he has got us all seated, and the elder installed in his former office, Boniface is ordered to draw the corks of the eight bottles of—it is no slander to say it—very ordinary port that grace the top of the table. The liquor, it is understood, has been, or will be, paid for by the winners of the cups; and it has got to be drunk out of the challenge cups, handed round the table among the company. Here there is no toasting, and no particular order to be observed in anything; only the cups have to be filled and emptied; so much does the rite of christening render imperative. And in due course they are emptied, amid infinite noise of speeches and songs, tobacco smoke, and incoherent talk about cattle and cattle breeding, and many things relating thereto, to me unintelligible. The indifferent port seems to tell more rapidly on the bulk of the company than the whisky-punch imbibed at our previous sitting had done. No doubt the two hours we have spent over the national compound have done their part in helping to mellow all our hearts; but I rather think the general sentiment of the company is expressed by the red-nosed cup-man,

when, as the result of an abortive effort to stand in equilibrio, he declares that, "that sour dirt o' wine 's nae like gweed honest fusky; it'll turn a man's heid afore he 's half gate on." How many are tipsy at the close of the christening, which takes place about half-past ten o'clock, I will not venture to guess. The chairman, who has proved himself, as he is on all hands declared to be, a jolly good fellow, certainly is not. Neither is the strong-headed old elder, for, as we are breaking up, with considerably more noise than haste, he tucks his challenge cup under his arm, and marches sturdily out. The ostler has his pony at the door, the elder mounts with a ponderous swing, shouts "Good-nicht, boys!" and in three minutes thereafter we can hear only the receding footfalls of his nag, half a mile off, as he clatters on his homeward way in the grey gloamin' light.

CHAPTER II.

THE PLOUGHING MATCH.

THERE are only two public events in the course of the year that stir the community of the Glen in its length and breadth. One is the Cattle Show, the other is the Ploughing Match. Glengillodram is famous for cattle, and is equally famous for peerless ploughmen.

The ploughing match occurs in the late autumn, when ways are dank, and daylight is brief. As the homely placard on the kirkyard gate informs us, "the ploughs must be on the ground by eight A.M.," at which hour the December dawn in our northern latitude has done little more than make the landscape dimly visible. "The ground" one finds to be a large field of even grass-land marked off into narrow sections by a number of small wooden pins, with a straight furrow drawn along at either end, leaving a narrow margin outside.

Forty ploughs are to compete; and here, to be sure, they are—forty pairs of plump, spirited, farm horses, groomed in the highest style of art, some with gaudy ribbons worked into their tails and manes, and all with plough harness polished as if the most expert of shoeblacks had done his best upon it.

Once, on a spring day journey by the London and North-Western Railway, I set myself to reckon up from the carriage window the diversities that might occur, as we passed on, in the style of team used to do the ploughing going on at that busy season. In the course of the journey from London to Warrington, the varieties that presented themselves were amusing.

Here, were two horses abreast in the traces, with one leader in front; there, were two leaders in front, and one behind, and then three abreast. Next, three in single file, four in single file, and at last five in single file. Generally, too, it was the wooden plough; and invariably there was one man to manage the plough, and another, or a lad to drive the team. With the Scottish ploughman it is altogether different. The plough is uniformly drawn by a single pair of horses walking abreast, and the ploughman both guides his plough and drives his team without any assistant. And it must needs be said that his ploughing wears a far more workmanlike look than the zig-zag uneven furrows cut by his English brother of the old school: who yet adheres to the numerous team and the antiquated wooden plough.

But the Glengillodram field is now in motion. The forty ploughs have all started, or are starting. They plough in sections, or ridges, of about a furlong in length. At the outset, every ploughman has to cut his "feirin" furrow in the line of the small wooden pins. With what a serious air each competitor bends himself to his task, and how quietly and steadily the well-in-hand teams pull forward! The ploughman has no guide but his eye, closely fixed on the line of pins before him; yet, when the other end of the field has been reached by the man we watch, we see that he has drawn a furrow, which, if not in the mathematical sense a straight line, is yet so remarkably straight that the eye can detect neither bend nor wrinkle in its whole length. And to be successful in the competition, he must cut every one of the thirty or forty furrows he has to plough equally straight. Nor is that the only requisite. Equality in depth of furrow is one condition of success; equality in width is another; and not less indispensable are evenness in "packing" the furrows against each other, and neatness in turning out the last narrow strip when the ridge has been pared down, furrow by furrow,

till only a mere thread of green runs from end to end of the field.

As the ploughing goes on, the spectators accumulate. They are not allowed to wander over the field, but they traverse its margin, and closely inspect the progress of the work. Here are the crack ploughmen of the parish; men who knock under to nobody: save in this way, that this year you may beat me, but next year I shall hope to beat you; here are less experienced aspirants, who look forward to a good time coming, when they also shall wear the blue ribbon of their order; here, too, are men of humbler ambition, who yet hope to win a place of some sort among the dozen of prizemen; and a sprinkling as well of rollicking blades who have never been troubled about the high honours of the day, and some of whom are swinging on with the determination to let it be seen that they can plough, if not as well, at least as quickly, as any of their contemporaries.

We find attention strongly centered upon two competitors, whom we quickly come to know as Sandy Macnab and Rory Mearison (if the reader be skilled in comparative philology he will be able to translate the last of the two names into Roderick Morison). They are the champion ploughmen of the parish. After a hard struggle, Rory gained his position as champion, and for several years wore his laurels almost undisturbed, but of late the honours of this veteran have been repeatedly put in jeopardy by his younger rival. And now, as the grizzled, weather-beaten man of fifty steps warily on, with firm hold of his plough-handles, while the pair of sleek, handsome bays in front are obedient to his softest whisper, we hear the exclamation: "Eh, man, but he 's makin' bonny wark!" But so, too, is Sandy Macnab. And by-and-bye the remark becomes frequent that if Sandy "dinna spoil himsel' wi' his mids, he is maist sure to get it." The "mids," or finishing furrow, is critical. Rory evidently sees it, gets nervous toward the close of his task, and—poor

man!—to his chagrin comes in as second prizeman; for the judges who are let loose on the land as soon as the ploughs are off, point at certain small patches of green surface which he has not turned perfectly down, and award the first prize to Sandy Macnab. "Ah, but Rory was a gran' ploughman, though his han 's growin' nae sae steady noo," says my sympathising neighbour to his friend; and his friend re-echoes the statement with a long narration of Rory's bygone exploits.

The ploughing match proper is now finished, and the subordinate competition—for which only part of the teams present enter—to decide who has the "best-groomed horses and the best-kept harness," comes next. This competition awakens but a limited amount of interest, compared with the other, inasmuch as it is felt that success in it depends only in part on the ploughman's skill and attention, and in part on the quality of the horses and harness due to the taste or means of the ploughman's master. And so, while the teams depart by this and the other route homeward, the newly-ploughed field continues to be the subject of minute critical inspection. The gathering of onlookers appears to be mainly from the class of ploughmen, or "day labourers," rather than the class of farmers, though there are a few of the latter, just as one or two farmers' sons have entered the lists as competing ploughmen. Generally the spectators are of the order who have had, or expect yet to have, personal experience in walking at the plough-tail. They are of all ages, too; from mere lads to old men bent double by hard toil with spade and pickaxe; and all keenly discuss the doings of the ploughmen with the confidence of those who know what they are talking about. I note particularly one firmly-knit young fellow, with keen grey eyes, rather sprucely dressed in a tweed suit, with shiny leather leggings. He is evidently not a ploughman, and yet he is volubly, and even somewhat dictatorially, pronouncing upon the ploughing to a group of

rustics, some of whom endeavour to combat certain of his opinions with not much apparent success. Who can he be? And the query is promptly met. "Oh, it 's Tammy Grant." "But who is Tammy Grant?" "Weel," quoth my intelligent and never-failing friend, through whose agency I am here, "he is jist the son o' a labourin' man o' the Glen. He was a ploughman here himsel' three year ago, an', for his years, a lad o' extraordinar' promise. But he was aye fond o' beuks, an' drew aside wi' nane mair than the dominie. So ye wudna hin'er Tammy to gi'e up the plough stilts, an' aifter a brush up at the parish skweel, gae aff to the college to study for the ministry." And I found it even so. Tammy Grant, who was entered of his second year as a student at Aberdeen University, was home for the Christmas vacation, and spending a day with evident zest among his old associates at their wonted employment.

It is not to be supposed that the ploughing match can pass by without affording some opportunity for social enjoyment. The dinner on this occasion is a mere private affair. The farmer who has got his field ploughed will, it is understood, bear the cost of dinner for the judges and such of his neighbours as he chooses to invite: as well as the cost of a light luncheon, consisting of "breid an' cheese, an' a dram," to the ploughmen; but the crowning entertainment is the Ploughman's Ball in the evening.

For the ball, tickets are not required, nor are special invitations necessary. Indeed, the stranger, of decent social standing, who should pass the night in the Glen and not attend the ball, would be reckoned no better than an unfriendly churl. And thus, when the business of my lawful calling has led me there, why should not I, too, partake of the pleasures going! For years on years, I understand, the ball has taken place at the elder's farm, and for the good reason that the elder has a large granary, extremely well adapted for the purpose,

which he cheerfully clears out and garnishes for the occasion, while he makes it an invariable rule—unless the laird happen to be there—to open the dance in person, with the most mature matron present.

Nine o'clock has come, and a dozen candles in tin sconces light up the spacious granary, around the side-walls of which are ranged "the youth and beauty of the district," as the local newspapers will inform their readers in due season. Among some scores of sturdy lads, I recognise sundry of the competing ploughmen, not omitting the veteran Rory Meerison, who appears to have plucked up his spirits wonderfully. (I understand Rory claims reflected credit as the prime instructor of the man who has this day beaten him.) And he has been at double pains, despite the result of the contest, in combing out his grey whiskers and setting his very high, and very stiff, shirt collar. But, indeed, the gentlemen are all in their "Sunday best," and each has his buxom partner by his side, set off in the nearest practicable approach to her ideal of ball-room style. A sprinkling of the men wear the kilt and plaid, and we number among these the hero of the day, Sandy Macnab, and Tammy Grant, the embryo parson, who affords us indisputable evidence that he is a sound disciple of the school of muscular Christians. A very few of the women affect the tartan too; but the greater part seem to have studied less the material of their dresses than how to achieve a sufficiently violent contrast in colours.

At the end of the granary, on a raised seat, are a couple of fiddlers, and near by them a solemn-looking kilted piper. Screech-screech-screech! The fiddles are in tune, and the floor is filled with waiting dancers. The gentlemen range themselves by their partners, on tiptoe, to begin; when the leading fiddler pushes his fourth finger far up his first string, and brings down his bow with a long-drawn squeak. This is "kissing time;" and, after an attempt more or less successful on the part of each male dancer to kiss his partner's cheek,

at it they go! The fiddlers dash into a stirring "Strathspey," and the dancers dance with a will. Reels, "foursome reels," and "eightsome reels," are the staple dances. To face your partner, and dance your "steps" at will, keeping time to the music, and describing the figure 8 on the floor when a change of position is required, is all the skill needed to make a passable appearance, although the more elaborate style of not a few on the floor would seem to speak of the assiduous professional services of the rustic dancing master. And now, the musicians change their strain, and give us "quick time"; the dancers become doubly energetic, and the scene becomes doubly animated; the gentlemen taking the change of time as the signal to snap their thumbs rapidly above their heads, and utter a wild "hooch." Five minutes have passed in this exercise, and the fiddlers pause: some of the gentlemen lead their partners back to their seats, but the greater part of them, and some of the ladies, have a second set-to after exactly the same fashion. And thus the dance goes on. While some are speedily danced out of breath, the energy and vivacity of the younger ploughmen seem only to increase as they urge on the hard-worked fiddlers, and caper through the "eightsome" figure with louder "hooch-hoochs!" than before.

By twelve o'clock all moderate dancers own to some fatigue, and the excellent elder who moves about, now here, now there, as a highly efficient master of the ceremonies, enters his emphatic protest against the efforts of a few of the more boisterous lads to pull reluctant or tired-out people on to the floor.

"Come, blaw up, Alister," cries the elder, "an' lat 's hae the Reel o' Thuilachan. Tammy, get them to the fleer."

Forthwith Tammy Grant, dressed, as has been said, in kilt and plaid of the tartan of his clan, picks out three other young fellows wearing "the garb of old Gaul," and one of whom is Sandy Macnab. Alister the

piper, who for the last hour or two has been looking the indignation he feels at the delay that has occurred in calling the national instrument into use, blows up his "chanter" with an air of grave superiority; his "drone" grunts, and grunts again, and at the first wild note that rends the air, the four dancers bow to the ladies of the company, and are off, with the picturesque "Highland fling," into the Reel of Thuilachan, which they keep up for the next eight or ten minutes with amazing vigour and skill, while the granary rings from floor to roof with the "skirl" of Alister's bagpipes. The dance ends amid loud acclamations, and there is a general desire to have it repeated. Human limbs and human lungs have a limit to their power, however, and cannot keep it up at this rate. Yet as the four best dancers have just left the floor, there is some difficulty in getting others to succeed them; and after a brief pause they dance the reel again in a more moderate style by way of encore. Then, to gratify the company (and not less to gratify the piper, who is jealous of his reputation as a skilled musician), Tammy Grant consents to dance the Ghillie Callum, over a pair of crossed walking sticks, in place of the traditional crossed swords.

While Ghillie Callum is going on, the elder has disappeared. His duties are multifarious. The time for refreshments has now come; and none but the elder can rightly concoct the toddy. The elder believes in wooden implements for the purpose. Ah! if you but saw the neat little ladles, fashioned of wild cherry tree, with ebon handles, which the worthy man has for private use when his friends are met round his hospitable board! The present is a public, and, so to speak, wholesale, occasion. Therefore there must be a large vessel for mixing, and the elder insists on the use of the wooden bushel measure. Into the bushel he shovels a heap of sugar; and then a "greybeard" jar of the "real Glengillodram mountain dew" is emptied in. Then water, at boiling point, from the huge copper

over the glowing peat fire on the kitchen hearth. And the elder bends him over the steaming bushel, stirs the toddy with a zeal and knowledge all his own, and has it fully tested and proved by the aid of two or three trusted cronies : a second greybeard being hard at hand to supply what may be lacking to give it the desiderated "grip."

Tin pitchers, delft mugs, and crystal jugs, are indifferently called into use for conveying the elder's mixture to the ball-room, where a band of "active stewards" are speedily at work, handing about supplies of crisp oat cakes and cheese, along with the toddy, which is freely served out to all. Yet let it not be supposed that we drink of it to drunkenness. In the keen air of this upland region, toddy is justly reckoned a kindly liquor, which by itself never wilfully breaks a man's character for sobriety ; and we drink of it freely on that clear understanding.

The hour of refreshment past, dancing is resumed with renewed vigour. By-and-bye some of the more staid heads in the company find opportunities for slipping home to bed ; but the flower of the youth and beauty, who deem the Ploughing Match Ball an entertainment peculiarly their own, keep the fiddlers going till three or four o'clock in the morning, when the ball breaks up, and the gentlemen gallantly see their lady partners home. And if the intensity of their enjoyment be not sufficiently marked by the lateness of the hour to which it is protracted, it ought to be by the fact that almost every one of those who have danced on until then will have to commence another day of hard manual labour, within a couple of hours after leaving the ball-room.

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